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CONSUMING FIRE

HARRIS ELLIOTT KIRK



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# THE CONSUMING FIRE

BY  
HARRIS ELLIOTT KIRK, D.D.

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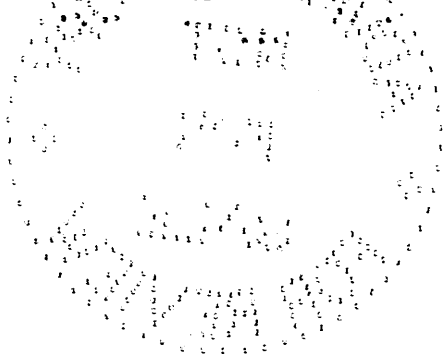
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TO  
THOMAS BAXTER GRESHAM  
A SON OF CONSOLATION



## PREFACE

It is too early to formulate a philosophy of the great war, but we are justified in speaking of some impressions with a certain degree of confidence. One is that the struggle has demonstrated on a vast scale the truth that there is something radically wrong with human nature, which the advance of intelligence and the refinements of civilization have not been able to remedy. It brought home to us the monstrous power of evil, and created a well-defined suspicion that the control of life, even under enlightened forms of government, is not wholly in man's power.

Another impression is that the successful issue of the struggle was due to the power of moral principle over intelligent self-interest and material efficiency. No doubt the Allied nations began the war with mixed motives — since human nature cannot vote unanimously on any subject — economic questions and self-preservation had much to do with it; still as the conflict developed in intensity, and the Teuton matured his policies, it appeared that above all other considerations this was a struggle between

moral principle and organized evil. Hatred of injustice and passion for the right sustained the Allied *morale* through four years of bitter suffering and sacrifice; and the terrible retribution which has overtaken autocratic Germany is a demonstration on the field of history that material efficiency cannot overcome moral reality.

A third impression, less obvious just now, but one that is certain to become better defined as the complications of readjustment tend towards a clarification of thought, is that the moral passion which sustained the Allied nations and the United States was the direct outcome of the influence of Christianity on Western civilization. No struggle has partaken so much of religious experience. It has been a holy war — the principle of righteousness against the spirit of evil — and this impression must be developed into a fixed conviction if we are to meet the responsibilities of the reconstruction period in an adequate way. The war has released multitudes of people from the tyranny of autocracy; the world has been made safe for democracy; but if this is to be a successful experiment democracy must derive its sanctions from faith in God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," they perish because they cannot resist the destructive force of self-interest. Democracy must be stabilized by a sanction for government which shall maintain respect for constituted authority in face of the self-regard-

ing propensities of human nature. Without the sentiment of justice and fair dealing such inchoate movements will destroy themselves; and if the Allied nations and the United States brought the great struggle to a successful issue through moral principle, it is all the more necessary that this principle should be decisive in the days of social readjustment.

I have written this book in order to show that the religious aspect of the question is fundamental to all the rest. What the world needs is a fresh realization of God in history; and I have relied less on abstract argument than upon demonstrable facts, and turned to one of the most fascinating and illuminating epochs of the past—the eighth century before Christ, which was distinguished by the successful struggle of the chosen people with Assyria — and to Isaiah, the supreme prophet of the Old Testament, in order to justify the view that in the conflict between material efficiency and moral reality, righteousness in the end is certain to prevail.

A study of this character is of the most timely importance; for the teaching of Isaiah lends itself with singular felicity to the social and religious understanding of the times. He lived in an age which in most aspects of its thought and life strikingly resembles our own. There is little difference after all between eighth century Judea and twentieth century America. The same moral principles were

involved, and the same issues decided on the hills of Palestine, which after four years of suffering and sacrifice have been successfully determined on the fields of France.

Isaiah faced the grave problems of social and religious readjustment that are at present our supreme concern; he brought to their solution a firm belief in the power of righteousness over organized and defiant evil; and he shows better than any of his contemporaries how religious faith sustained the *morale* of a nation under the stress and strain of a world war.

I have limited the study to the essential features of the prophecies contained in the first thirty-nine chapters of the book of Isaiah; with the section beginning at the fortieth chapter, which has a different historical setting, we have here no concern.

I have had access to the best authorities; what was needed, however, was not detailed information, but a spirit for the interpretation of the larger aspects of the great epoch; and if I have been at all successful I owe it to the writings of Principal George Adam Smith, whose "Historical Geography of the Holy Land," and commentaries on Isaiah and the Book of the Twelve Prophets have been my constant and loved companions for years. I gladly confess my indebtedness to him.

I wish to thank Mr. William R. Moody, whose invitation to deliver a course of lectures, during

## PREFACE

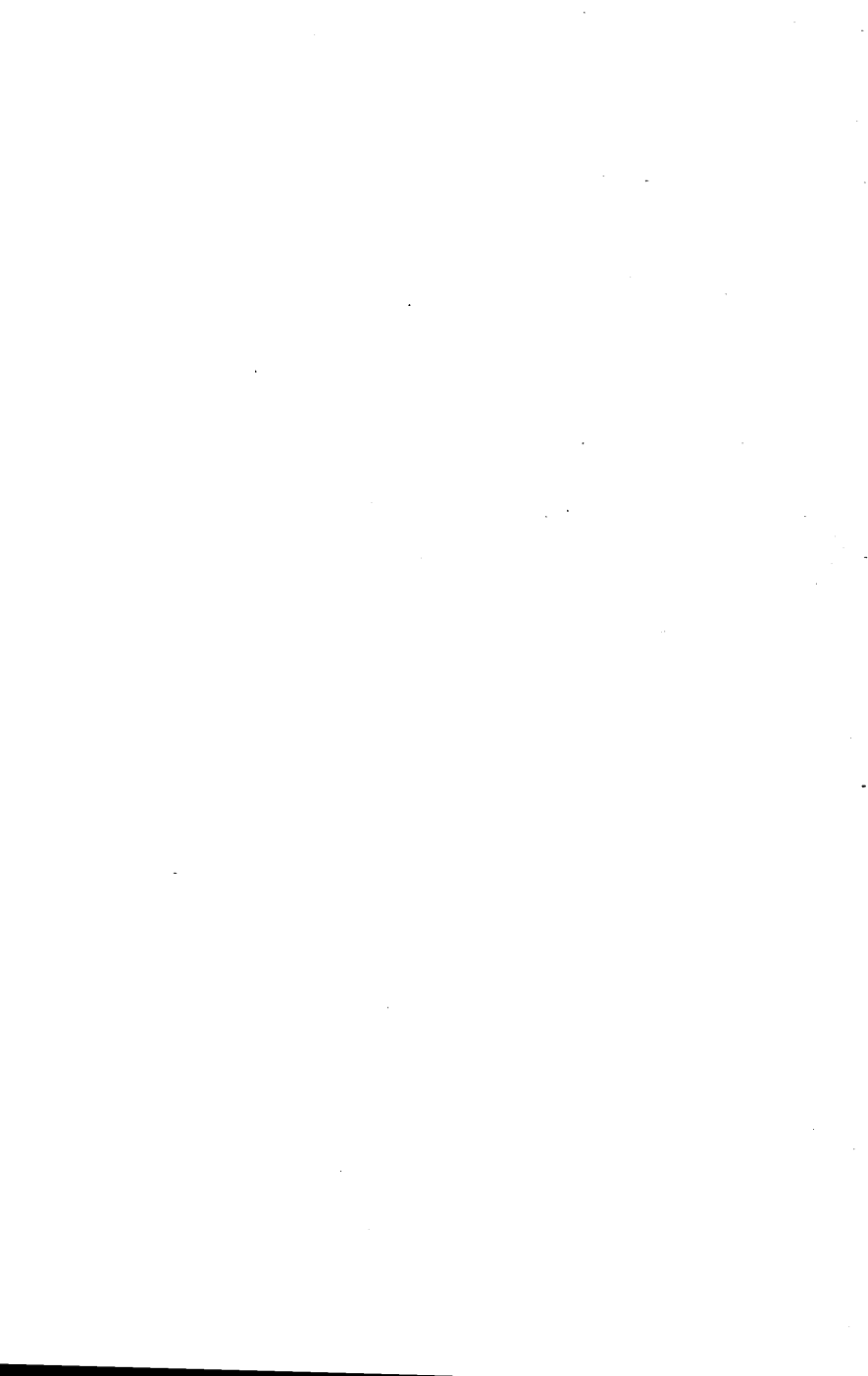
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the Christian Workers' Conference, at Northfield, Mass., during the summer of 1918 gave me an opportunity of formulating my thoughts on the subject. I am particularly indebted to my colleague and friend, Rev. Robert S. Axtell, for a careful reading of the proofs.

H. E. K.

The Manse

Franklin Street Presbyterian Church  
Baltimore, January, 1919.





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# THE CONSUMING FIRE

## CHAPTER I

### INTO THE ARENA OF WORLD POLITICS

Isaiah i:18: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord."

THIS is the first and last word of the prophet — that religion can be thought about, that the ways of providence are open to human intelligence. The reasonableness of religion was the particular contention of Isaiah. The chief fault he found with the people of his time was that they did not like to think very seriously about religious matters; and the prophet labored in and out of season to make them face the serious but salutary facts of everyday life.

This enables us to understand the function of a prophet. The popular notion of a prophet is that he is a predictor of future events; and while prediction is undoubtedly one of his duties, his real function is to deliver the message of God. He furnishes spiritual interpretations of secular events, explains the meaning of history, and justifies the ways of God to men. In other words, a prophet gives a reliable

philosophy of history in the terms of man's spiritual experience.

On this account the relation of prophecy to history is of the first importance. A prophet brings God's message to men of his time; his teaching of course develops principles that bear upon all time, still these principles cannot become intelligible until we have ascertained his precise relation to his own age. The meaning of prophecy becomes clear only in relation to history. We can no more comprehend Isaiah's teaching apart from his times than we can understand the Constitution of the United States out of relation to the early history of America. That is why we must know something of Isaiah's world before we can understand his message.

Isaiah's period extends from B. C. 740, the year that king Uzziah died, to the close of the century. Micah was his contemporary in Judah, while Amos and Hosea were concerned with the same problems in the northern kingdom of Israel. So far as known, Isaiah was a native of Jerusalem; he came of an aristocratic if not a princely family, and was a life long intimate of the ruling classes of the nation. His ministry of some forty years was entirely devoted to the interests of the southern kingdom of Judah whose capital city was Jerusalem.

The best introduction to a prophet is a study of the world in which he was brought up; the political, social, and religious conditions of the time to which

he brought his illuminating and constructive interpretations. Let us begin with a broad generalization: all great historic movements are due to the collision of ideas. Our great war was the result of a collision of opposite notions of national development, morals, and civilization. Such a conflict is never caused by single events; while it may have been occasioned by a comparatively unimportant incident, its cause is to be explained by principles. Such principles slowly mature until they attain an explosive force, and when they reach this dangerous state they produce such things as we have seen in our time. The events which made up the dramatic history of Isaiah's time were caused by a similar development and explosion of ideas. Historians may easily sit down after the event and explain its history in terms of principles, just as a century later a clear understanding of all the principles involved in the great war will be more easily gained than now; but herein lies the singular superiority of the prophet that he sees the trend of events before they fully ripen. The historian at his best is a backward looking man, the prophet on the contrary is a forward looking man. He stands on the world's ramparts and looking out over the feverish life of peoples, prophesies the course that things will take. He is able to do this because above the passions of men and the conflicts of nations he sees — God. This is one reason why we can never get along without prophets, for through

their eyes we may look above and beyond the events of the moment and discern the drift of the times, understand the significance of the principles involved and stabilize our faith by a vision of God on the field of history. I believe that in these times of readjustment no better discipline for our statesmen and diplomats could be suggested than a thorough study of Isaiah and his world.

That which makes him stand out as the supreme prophet of the Old Testament is the coincidence of two tremendous ideas: his world and his God. Sometimes God ordains that great ideas should come together in a man's mind; and when this happens the course of history is changed. The union of these vast conceptions in the teaching of Isaiah constitutes a fresh departure of the human race on the pathway of its destiny. Other men had seen these things, "as through a glass darkly"; Amos and Hosea for instance saw them clearly and in relation, but neither had opportunity to apply them to the world situation. But Isaiah not only saw them distinctly but boldly applied them to the interpretation of his times, and so accurately did he sense the drift of things that history vindicated him. To no man was it given to see so many of his prophecies fulfilled; and that not because of any magical influence upon events, but on account of the sanity of a pure spiritual passion and a faith sustained at all points by a reasonable effort to understand the

mind of God. He is a striking example of the truth that a clean heart makes a clear mind.

Isaiah began to prophesy, as George Adam Smith remarks, at a period when for the first time in history the idea of a world set over against a nation was breaking in on the minds of peoples. It is difficult for us who live in a world compacted together by steam and electricity to realize the isolation of ancient peoples. We are quite familiar with the difference between nationalism and internationalism. Nationalism moves within the fixed limits of one people who, while recognizing the existence of other peoples, do not necessarily conceive themselves as having any important concern for those without the pale. The ancient world was broken up in this way between Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Barbarians, Romans and Provincials. Internationalism on the other hand is based upon the recognition of relationships, either for weal or woe, among peoples of different races and countries; and this phase was slow to develop in the ancient world because of a series of stubborn barriers constituted chiefly of racial prejudices which blocked the way. The normal basis for society before Isaiah's time was tribal or national; and by nation one usually meant a single city, a city-state. Each little kingdom in Palestine, for instance, was a fortified city, with a small province lying immediately about it, and the tribal idea still dominated the thinking of those peoples, in spite

of their occasional contact with larger units like Egypt or Assyria. War as they understood it was tribal or limited to strife between small cities or kingdoms, situated for the most part in their immediate vicinity. This provincial state of mind, encouraged by their limited conception of religion, prevailed with hardly a check until the middle of the eighth century B. C.

At that time, however, which coincides with Isaiah's call, great and rapid changes took place; the conception of a world organization quite different from the familiar national idea was brought to full consciousness, and was occasioned as it usually is by the menace of a terrible and devastating war. The small city-state found itself confronted by the big state, and little nations were threatened with extinction by a great empire.

It seems almost inevitable that great social and political changes such as are occasioned by war should set men to thinking of entities larger and more enduring than those associated with nationalism. Sometimes it leads to the substitution of ideal conditions for visible relations as with the Stoic conception of universal brotherhood, which came to him when Alexander the Great knocked his little world to bits; or when the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes set the devout Jew to dreaming of a catastrophic establishment of the kingdom of God. Such changes of view rarely come without altered



social conditions and painful experiences. The breaking in of this tremendous idea on the Hebrew consciousness was an essential element in education, but it was a costly and painful experience, the consequences of which were never forgotten.

Such a change has come over the modern world. A great and terrible war has once again driven peoples out of their racial seclusion and national isolation to contemplate a League of Nations which shall make wars to cease and bring in that era of brotherhood, the advent of which has haunted the mind of man since the dawn of history.

While we had long been familiar with the idea of empire, we still held this in harmonious relation to the notion and the right to exist of the small state. But since Germany with Assyrian-like brutality asserted the right of world dominion, together with the heathenish doctrine that small states have no rights which strong states are bound to respect, we have again reached a position where the small state can no longer hope to exist without powerful and offensive alliances with larger and stronger entities.

So was it in Isaiah's time. Beginning with Assyria's ruthless assertion of the right to rule the world, the peoples of Palestine definitely and permanently came within the sphere of world politics, and to the end of their national career the chosen people were under the dominion of one or the

other of great world empires whose history covers the last seven centuries of the pre-Christian period: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. This was the meaning, dimly understood by the statesmen of Isaiah's time, of the half-century of preparation on the part of Assyria. The people did not see it, any more than most of us understood the significance of Germany's military policy; and even when it was apprehended, the threatened nations did not like to admit it; but Isaiah saw it clearly and concretely. He knew exactly what it would mean to these little kingdoms, hiding there in fancied seclusion in the deep valleys of Palestine. The age of the small, isolated state was gone forever; the chosen people, for weal or woe, were about to leave the nest of provincial seclusion for the terrible arena of world politics. They were drifting blindly into dangerous waters, without pilots or adequate knowledge of navigation. They were especially barren of great ideas and singularly obtuse to the most glaring facts of the time. In any event it meant that they were going into a larger world; a vaster experience awaited them with grave consequences to their religious destiny; and it was his clear intuition of the momentous change impending that gave to our statesmanlike seer his tremendous command over a world situation. This was enough to make him a statesman, a diplomat, or even a great ruler; but not enough to make him a prophet. Another idea was

required to fit him for the rôle of spiritual leader, an idea that was to come into the sharpest collision with the notion of world expansion, and that is to be found in Isaiah's God.

From the days of Moses the chosen people had been theoretical monotheists; that is, they believed in one God but they were slow to follow up their opportunity by the assertion of the non-existence and worthlessness of other gods; nor were they able save in vague and inchoate ways to divine the meaning of a world providence. Idolatry existed side by side with the religion of Jehovah; it was a constant and always a disturbing element in the popular religion; and the ordinary Hebrew, be he prince or peasant, was quite content to regard Jehovah as a private and tribal Deity. So long as they were content with this view, it was practically impossible for them to think of a Divine providence effective in regions beyond the promised land. It was enough that Jehovah was their private Deity, the guardian of their land, and this selfish notion shrunk the notion of God to their own small dimensions. In their tribal wars, which were many, they saw chiefly a struggle between their God and those of other peoples. The idea of a ruling providence, co-extensive with the world, was not then a vital element in their faith, and this of course in spite of their prophets and lawgivers.

One reason why the faith of the ordinary Hebrew

broke down so soon as the terrible Assyrian invaded Palestine was the fear, that after all, the gods of Assyria were more powerful than the God of the chosen people. It seemed to cast suspicion upon the ancient tradition that Jehovah would care for His people; it drove into their weak minds a disturbing doubt as to God's power; and in those days a God without power would soon be a God without worshippers. To some, like Ahaz, it seemed expedient in the interest of greater national security to add the gods of other and successful nations — Damascus, for instance — to their own religion.

When the Assyrian storm broke upon the land it at once raised the question: Who is the real God of the world? Who controls events beyond the frontiers of the land of promise? Is it Jehovah, or some other deity? The question could not be fully answered by reaffirming the old tribal idea, for the domain of the tribal deity had been invaded from without. What was wanted, though inchoately understood was some assurance that Jehovah was the ruler of the world; not of Palestine only, but also of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

How then did Isaiah meet this demand? We must keep clearly in mind that the essential element in deity for the ancient mind was power. Character as we learn from Greek mythology was a non-essential; but power a god must have, if he was to have

devotees; and it was because the power of Israel's God seemed broken by the Assyrian menace that the people were prostrate before it. Now Isaiah's bold originality lies in this, that while he clearly asserts a world providence, calmly speaking of Assyria as God's ax, God's rod, God's razor for the pruning of Israel's superfluous growths, he nowhere bases his faith in providence on the old pagan doctrine of bare power, but goes back behind power to the character which conditions its exercise, and derives his conception of power from the righteousness of God. Other prophets of course had held this view; it had always been the faith of Israel's spiritual leaders, but it was left to Isaiah to apply it vigorously to the interpretation of a world situation; he made it concrete, practical, and terribly realistic. He affirmed the truth that world-control was based not upon material successes but moral reality. He held the supreme faith that God was righteous, and that righteousness only was reality; he summoned to that changeless tribunal all nations and peoples and boldly founded his doctrine of providence upon the character of Jehovah. He held to this faith in the face of all the changes and trials of forty years of Assyrian ruthlessness. This made him the greatest constructive statesman of the chosen people, but it also made him the supreme prophet of all time; and it is immensely illuminating in the present crisis

of social readjustment, when so many of the problems of Isaiah's time are calling for present-day solution to notice the basis of his faith.

Isaiah's statesmanship rested squarely and consciously on his religion. His faith in providence — which controlled events and used the policies of nations for purposes of the Divine will — rested upon two great convictions: righteousness and grace; and both these ideas, as we have seen, sharply distinguished his conception of God from that not only of the pagan, but also from that of the masses of the Hebrew people.

The pagan believed that sovereignty rested on force, and force only. A god was worshipped, feared and served in proportion to his ability to demonstrate his power over men. But while Isaiah asserted the fact of God's power, he grounded it always upon God's character. God must rule the world, said the prophet, because He is righteous. Only righteousness is real, and only that which conforms to righteousness can last. Everywhere the world was moving, apparently in accord with the will of man; but over and beyond it he saw the righteous purpose of Jehovah. Righteousness was not conceived as a static quality of an absentee deity, living in some Epicurean paradise far above the flaming walls of the world; but it was dynamic, intensely active, and close to man's heart and life. The eyes of glory were looking in upon the council chamber,

scanning every state paper, and noting the thoughts and intents of the soul.

This faith in the all-pervasive power of righteousness was linked to another great conviction that God was gracious. The stern unapproachable holiness of Jehovah was tempered by the marvelous loving kindness of the Lord. No prophet has spoken with greater positiveness of the righteousness of God, yet none has excelled him in the tenderness and graciousness of his appeal. Over and over again he asserted that evil nations like Assyria might, owing to the accidents of power, do any amount of harm to weaker peoples; injustice and wickedness might, for a season, be successful, but it was only temporary. The real test of a nation was not actuality, measured by material accumulations and brute force; but reality, a state determined by moral relations. The only reality on this planet was righteousness. Because God was righteous, He was sovereign; because God's people were under His protection, they could not be destroyed. Only the real, what was in harmony with the nature and purposes of Jehovah, was permanent. With God, visible accumulations, atheistic impudence, and arrogant pride, were but materials for a judgment day bonfire.

Isaiah assured the people of his country that no matter how deeply they might become involved in the terrible struggle, he was certain that righteousness would prevail in the end because it was guided

by the spirit of grace, by the loving kindness of the Lord. God was controlling this mighty world movement in behalf of the spiritual interests of His people; He was sifting the chaff from the wheat. Assyria with her boundless ambitions, her seemingly irresistible armies, her arrogant claim to world dominion was just God's ax, an instrument in the Divine hand. When He finished with it, He would discard it: Assyria could not move a step beyond the Divine purpose. It was this tremendous faith that made the prophet the rallying point in those terrible times; how he gained this faith we shall have occasion to see later; it remains now to ask: How so unimportant a people as the Israelites became involved in world politics? And the answer is found in the peculiar geographical position of the Palestinian states.

The world of the eighth century before Christ was dominated by two entirely different conceptions of civilization: one founded upon mind, the other upon matter.

The civilization of Egypt was based upon the mind, that of Assyria upon a machine-like organization of material forces; and it was inevitable that these two conceptions should eventually come into deadly conflict. The distance between the Nile and the Mesopotamian valleys, homes of these antagonistic civilizations, was only four hundred and ninety miles, and the only possible line of communication between them passed through Palestine. Now Palestine, owing to



its peculiar topography, was singularly constructed for the production of great historic results. It could not be invaded from the east since it was protected by a mountain barrier, flanked by the Arabian desert; neither could it be approached from the sea because there was no natural harbor south of Mount Carmel. The only possible way through it ran from north to south, around the sea of Galilee, across the great plain of Esdraelon — the battlefield of Palestine — and down the maritime plain. Northern Israel lay close to this natural highway, and was the first to become involved, while Judah, more remote in its mountain fastness, was the last to feel the pressure of the world movement. The people of God were by these peculiar topographical features placed between the upper and nether millstone of the Nile and Mesopotamian valleys. The only way for an army of conquest to reach Egypt from Mesopotamia was to hammer its way through these little Palestinian states. The position of Israel and Judah was in many respects like that of Belgium, and each country in its own way has furnished battlefields on which have been decided the fate of civilizations.

For many years Assyria had been quietly getting ready for the unavoidable conflict; the sinful lust for world power dominated her evil heart, and she slowly but surely accumulated men, munitions, and treasure, and made plans for the subjugation of the

only remaining empire capable of disputing the claim, namely Egypt. But to reach Egypt she was compelled to pass through Syria and Palestine. What would be the attitude of these small nations towards such a movement? It is clear from a consideration of the whole campaign that Assyria began her forward movement with a fatal miscalculation. Small states have little offensive power, but in their own territory they have an immense defensive force. In all probability Germany's miscalculation with reference to Belgium was one of the prime causes of her ultimate defeat. And what took place in Belgium at the beginning of the war, happened in Palestine in the opening of the Assyrian campaign. She began her westward thrust toward Egypt in B. C. 745, five years before the call of Isaiah, under the lead of king Tiglath-pileser, but she did not reach her objective until B. C. 672, seventy three years later. Her slow progress was due in large measure to the immense defensive power of the small states of Palestine. It is true that only one of these kingdoms had any sort of autonomy when the eighth century closed; still the campaign against Assyrian aggression is a glorious page in Palestinian history. Judah's successful resistance of this world movement was largely due to the statesmanlike leadership of her great prophet.

The policy of Assyria was of the most ruthless sort. A great brute of a nation, coarse and sen-

sual, believing only in force, of slow moving mentality and little creative imagination, all her methods of warfare and notions of national development were dictated by the lowest propensities of human nature. Her policy was to make war with Teutonic frightfulness. We read of chariots with scythe blades and horsemen swimming in blood, of mutilations and tortures unbelievable until our day. Her aim was not the subjugation of nations, but the destruction of peoples; her common method was the deportation of inhabitants of conquered territories and the thorough elimination of races. The small nations against which she first hurled her forces were utterly incapable of successful resistance, lacking in diplomatic resource and military skill. In such a crisis as this Isaiah was raised up to preach the everlasting reality of righteousness and the certain doom of all peoples who based their hope of success upon material efficiency and godless ambitions, and who made their plans without regard to the rights of other nations and in utter contempt for moral reality.

The likeness of this to our present world is simply astounding. The more carefully one reads the history of Assyria the more profoundly is one convinced that Germany in the great war was simply Assyria, plus the resources of modern civilization. No nation of past times, so far as I know, had so closely followed the Assyrian model as this nation that boasted itself as the most cultured in existence. Germany

has displayed the same coarse passions, the same bovine stupidity in diplomacy, the same faith in brute strength and material efficiency, and has entertained the same egoistic aim at world dominion; and in order to cover the crude materialism of her purposes with a religious veneer changed the God of our Lord Jesus into the image of an old brutal Assyrian deity. Confronting her were precisely the same moral and spiritual interests that faced Assyria; what happened in Palestine in the eighth century B. C. has happened in Belgium in the twentieth century A. D.

The modern world was upset by the same collision of great ideas — this explosion of different and utterly antagonistic conceptions of life, social order, morality, and religion. The great war has been a struggle, not between nations, but between peoples and civilizations. With all her boasted culture the civilization of Prussianized Germany was based upon matter. She used the resources of mind and soul in behalf of a purely materialistic conception of reality. The civilization of the Allied peoples is based upon the mind: upon the human spirit; and now that the war is ended, and fearful retribution has fallen upon the aggressor, it would seem as if this civilization of mind and spirit is to dominate the world. Life would not be worth living under any other conditions; and that the civilized world was willing to fight through four years of terrible suffering for

the establishment of its aims, is one of the best guarantees that this ideal conception of human relationships, in the days of readjustment, shall not perish from the earth.

Our times, too, have revealed many of the characteristic weaknesses that were common to Isaiah's age. We have suffered from the same hesitations, futilities and inaptitudes; more than all else the great war developed a need for understanding the spiritual roots of the moral passion which made the Allied nations capable of endurance until victory crowned their efforts; for it has been essentially a war between enlightened self-interest, relying chiefly on organized materialism, and moral principle; and this gives to the teaching of Isaiah an immense and significant importance for the proper adjustment of our minds to the enlarged conceptions of social duty and political responsibility, to say nothing of religious opportunity, which properly belong to the period of reconstruction.

Isaiah's root principle, let it never be forgotten, is that righteousness only is permanent. God is real because He is righteous, and it was from this simple principle that Isaiah deduced his doctrine that God must control the world. Nations as well as individuals are in His hands; He uses one nation to chastise another nation, yet above all the hardships and changes incident to world disturbance, it becomes increasingly clear that the Divine purposes are tem-

pered by grace and loving kindness. It is quite clear to my mind that God has used Germany to chastise the modern world for the same specific purposes as He used the Assyrian rod to discipline His rebellious and indifferent people in the long, long ago. But Germany, with all her proud complex of arrogance, brutality, and greed has been in God's hand nothing more than an ax in the hands of the woodman, which He has discarded, now that His righteous purposes are fulfilled.

Whatever is contrary to righteousness in principle or practice cannot last. This tremendous truth, hurled against the coming centuries by Isaiah, reaffirmed in an immortal expression by Habakkuk a century later, and sounding like the voice of eternity over all the noise and pain and confusion of the great war is this, that a nation that bases its hopes upon unrighteous exploitation of other peoples in disregard of their legitimate rights is a swollen, putrescent thing; it cannot last because it is impossible for material efficiency and atheistic pride to live in a world of moral reality.

Germany was doomed, not simply because of what the Allies were capable of doing to her, but because she was in conflict with a Power which history has vindicated over and over again. Long before her final collapse and while the moral passion of the Allied peoples was growing more pure and unselfish through the cleansing discipline of their sufferings, the world

was filled with the foul stench of her bursting carcass. Her doom was written in flaming letters across the sky. An invisible line had been drawn between Germany's ambitions and her goal; on it had been written: "They shall not pass"; and when she reached it, she collapsed. She has been at war with God; and like Assyria, Babylon, and Persia, the star of her military autocracy has set never to rise again.

Whence came Isaiah's vivid consciousness of God's realistic and dynamic holiness, faith in which enabled him in the long struggle with Assyrian ruthlessness, to believe in the ultimate triumph of righteousness? consecration of the times.

It came, as we shall see, from his prophetic call: the

## CHAPTER II

### THE CONSECRATION OF THE TIMES

Isaiah vi:1: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw . . . the Lord."

ISAIAH'S influence over the children of Israel during the Assyrian war was due, as we saw in the last chapter, to his faith in God. He believed that God was the sovereign of this world because God alone was real. This conception was based upon two great convictions: righteousness and grace. Isaiah founded his doctrine of providence upon the character of God. God was regnant because He was righteous; but righteousness was everywhere tempered by grace, by loving kindness. The power of Assyria was limited by the Divine purpose; the misfortunes and sufferings resulting from this heathenish outbreak were by grace to be turned into disciplinary mercies, fatherly chastisements. We have now to ask: What was the source from which Isaiah derived this conception of God?

All great convictions grow in a certain soil; they do not rise suddenly in the mind, but develop slowly until they reach explosive force, whereupon they ap-



pear as a compelling intuition of truth, an imperative call to service, an unescapable vision of duty. Following their ordinary duties there suddenly emerges in the consciousness of the prophets an irresistible belief that they must do a certain thing; they become convinced that God is calling them. "I was patiently following my lowly occupation as a vine-dresser and a fig pincher, when suddenly," says Amos, "God called me to go, prophesy to His people Israel." "I was bowed down in sorrow, my home was desolate and my heart was broken," says Hosea, "when suddenly it became clear to me that this was a calling of God." And so it was with Isaiah. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord;" that was the beginning of his conscious authority as a prophet; and it was this imperative sense of a Divine calling that developed in his mind the great convictions about God.

Yet there is nothing irrational about such an experience. It can be explained in part at least, because it has a definite relation to past experience. In fact one is impressed at all points with the sanity of the prophets. They know definitely that God is calling them, yet they realize that their call is intimately related to their past experience; and this is due to the reaction of outward events upon states of mind. God uses the events of a man's life to develop a consciousness of mission; that is why Isaiah could associate his spiritual vision with a great

secular event: "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord."

Political and social changes often make men conscious of spiritual needs. This striking reaction of outward events upon states of soul may be illustrated over and over again. Many a spiritual Jew could say: "In the year that Antiochus Epiphanes sacked Jerusalem, I saw the Lord"; as many a spiritual man of our time can say: "In the year that Germany invaded Belgium, I saw the Lord." The reason in each case is plain. Bitter disillusionment is often the moment of superior spiritual vision. Change teaches the spiritual man to fear God. When we become aware of the instability of political institutions we are apt to realize our spiritual necessities; our souls are set on fresh quests for peace; and if we be righteously inclined we come sooner or later to have a more satisfactory knowledge of God.

With Isaiah the awakening to a consciousness of a prophetic mission coincided with a bitter disillusionment. He was twenty five years of age, and doubtless up to that time had been a nation-centered man; religious, of course, but patriotic too; and sharing in the illusions of his age. Although later he was to learn the bitter but salutary truth that his nation was degraded and godless, yet now to his young and unstained nature there was something pure, lofty, and ideal about this people. He greatly admired the king, who for fifty years had reigned

over Judah, as great a man as Solomon, possessing many traits of character likely to attract the admiration of a youth. It was a time of prosperity and progress; when suddenly the great king died, a leper, rejected of God. It must have been a terrible moment to the young man; it was one of those moments common to inexperienced youth when utter desolation overtakes the soul. His ideal world had suddenly dissolved leaving him alone and friendless in the garish light of day.

Even then, both Israel and Judah were feeling the influence of the terrible Assyrian advance, which had begun five years before. Israel's confidence in meeting her enemies was largely based on the power and prestige of great kings; but when Uzziah died, the nation drifted towards anarchy; its guidance was committed to weak and sinful men. The young man felt that he was living in a very unstable world. In a very real sense, the death of Uzziah marked the end of Isaiah's youth; it was a time when he felt that he must leave his ease to assume his responsibilities, but how? True such an experience made him more mature, but less confident all the same of the future and infinitely less sure of himself and of his time; but in the hour of prostration the devotional habits of his life came to his aid, and led him to the house of God. He dare not try to think it out alone; it was too painful to him; he would go into the sanctuary and seek the consolation of worship. When

he came within the Temple courts, sensitive, receptive, disillusioned, with every avenue to his soul open to spiritual impressions — when he came into the sanctuary he saw — God. Seeing here means something more than sense perception; what it means is that this was the moment, a definite period in his conscious life, when he transferred his faith from the nation to God alone. He learned for the first time a lesson he never forgot — the essential difference between a nation and a divine kingdom, between a patriotic passion and a spiritual relationship. It was the moment when his life became God-centered; and high above nations, peoples, and political movements he saw the greatness and the glory and the onliness of God. Life, which in the hour of disenchantment had become a terrible experience, now takes on a deep and glorious solemnity. Breaking out on all sides of the Temple, cutting into shreds the ritual screen which had hitherto hidden the Divine glory from his soul, Isaiah saw God “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.” Here and not in Judah, nor yet in Assyria, nor yet anywhere on homely earth, but amid the ineffable glories of the eternal world was the real sovereignty controlling destiny. Thus to the receptive soul come moments of realization; material screens become transparent and man sees spirit touching spirit and knows the meaning of reality.

This conception lies at the basis of Isaiah's preach-

ing; to miss it is to miss the secret of his constancy and of his strength; above all, it is to miss the secret of his great peace. I think he had this sense of divine reality more deeply impressed upon him than any other prophet. Jeremiah alone of others is fit to stand beside Isaiah. His task was in many respects far more difficult and discouraging; still he had the same advantage of knowing the greatness of God; yet we remember how he complained, hesitated, and sometimes doubted. But Isaiah never faltered; he never doubted or complained because he was consistently loyal to the pole-star of his soul. His immense superiority appears best on the dark background of discouragement and defeat which overtook his nation. He stood among them in the hour of disaster the only great believer in God; facing the terrors of the Assyrian advance with a calm and confident spirit because he knew experimentally that God alone was real. He had seen the Lord.

This is the essence of religious faith. It is not to believe in certain theories of religion, or to possess certain habits and relationships; but essentially to believe God and to believe in God, that is to trust Him because you know that He alone is real and only the real is permanent. Once to believe this is to gain that foothold beyond time, which Carlyle says, gives a man a foothold within time. Isaiah could proclaim during the forty years of trial and disaster which tormented even the most spiritual of his generation:

in the year of bitter disillusionment when men's hearts were failing and old ideals were shattered; when the fair fabric of our civilization was rent asunder by the ruthless teeth of the Assyrian boar; when God's people were sunk in lethargy and so befogged with delusions that they had no notion where they were drifting, in that terrible unforgettable year "in the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne." The throne was the *essence of reality*.

It was from this tremendous intuition of the essential nature of God that Isaiah drew his great convictions that God was both righteous and gracious. He heard the heavenly singers, singing of the holiness of God. It was no mere static, inactive holiness, but something intensely dynamic, potent and terribly close to man's life. The whole earth was full of God's glory, and glory was nothing else but manifested holiness. Here we come upon the most radical and original notion of the prophet that holiness is an *atmosphere of fire*. It burned about the universe like a great devouring flame, it consumed everything that was unlike itself, and refined and purified everything that resembled it; therefore holiness was the essence of reality. The righteous was the real, because it alone was fitted to live in the fire. What was Assyria then, with all her proud claims, but just God's ax, God's thing, to be discarded when the Divine purposes were fulfilled? Assyria was doomed

because she could not live in the fire; but the righteous man, the man of faithfulness should survive, because he alone was fitted to live in the atmosphere of reality.

Is it any wonder, then, that the young man was overcome by this terrible, glorious truth, for he saw rising between him and God a great smoke screen. This smoke was occasioned by the contact of reality with unreality, of fire with that which could be consumed. The work of destruction was already beginning. Clouds and darkness were rising to hide the glorious throne from the eyes of the worshipper. The vision of God's reality was also the discovery of his unfitness; need we wonder then at his words: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

This dark night of the soul overtakes a truly penitent man; it is the hour of austerity and searching self-examination; it is the moment when the awakened soul exchanges the episodic terror of unknown forces for the constant fear of a God who is being progressively known. Such an experience is always painful, but unless we pass through it we can never understand the glory of God's holiness, nor the greater glory of His mercy.

Disillusion was followed by self-knowledge. Thus began the practical realism that made Isaiah a man

tremendously in love with facts; a root-and-branch sort of a man whose soul had been searched by this terrible, this remorseless reality. He felt himself undone, paralyzed, and helpless. Most of all his very lips were unclean. Here had this soul-awakening truth come to him; it waited to be proclaimed from the house tops, yet he dare not declare it because his lips were soiled. He had a passion to worship and to adore, he longed to join in the hymn of praise, yet between him and God was this terrible smoke screen, and on his lips such defilement as to make him dumb forever. He had a truth for which the world was waiting, but its very possession made him an alien, a wanderer among men. There was nothing in environment to aid him for he dwelt in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

He had knowledge of God enough to kill the soul with too much light, but he dare not speak of it; and then when he felt himself lost amid clouds and darkness there came out of the mist a messenger with a living coal and touched his lips and made them clean. It was the keen awakening of this sensitive soul to that other truth about God which was the foundation of his faith, namely, that God is merciful and full of loving kindness. No prophet has equaled Isaiah's insight into the Divine mind, for here in this symbolism of the altar is a clear intimation of the cross and the atoning mercy of Jesus. I think we see this clearly, but do we as



clearly apprehend the other implication, that of the ordeal by fire? Isaiah believed that God was real because He was holy; but holiness was an unescapable atmosphere of fire, burning around men, and nations, and things. It made men aware of their unreality, of their utter helplessness before God, their unfitness to live in the fire. How then could man dwell in the midst of this devouring flame? The answer is here. The fiery essence may, through the mercy of God, as here, become a cleansing medium; but do we realize that such cleansing by fire is always painful? God's mercy is mediated by the same agent that destroys the wicked. The righteous fire would eventually destroy Assyria, but the long, painful discipline resulting from the war would become to the righteous, a cleansing fire of mercy; but do we yet see that the ways of mercy may be as painful in their operation as are the ways of judgment?

The realization of this that the pains and disciplines of the time were intelligible through the discovery of active holiness is the basis of Isaiah's unflinching faith that God is working for Israel a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." It took Israel a long time to see this; I wonder if we see it yet?

Here then is the source of Isaiah's great convictions. When holiness and sin touch each other there is first, mist, the destruction of that which

is unholy; then, mercy, with its painful ordeal by fire; and then, this — the opening of the ears and the awakening to a consciousness of mission. We talk a great deal of understanding God, of spiritual discernment, but the only way to it is through the cleansing of the soul. When Isaiah's lips were cleansed, he got his ears open and heard the common but fundamental demand for service. The call to service is the authentication of the cleansing process, that without which the process is an illusion. This is the certain test of religious reality; not that Divine mercy relieves man from responsibility, but definitely transfers his interest from himself and the world about him to God, and shuts him up to a clear-cut dedication of life to the Divine will; hence we need not be surprised to hear the prophet's response: "Here am I, send me."

There is no suggestion here of argument, such as took place between God and Jeremiah; no questions are asked about the nature of the service required. It is utter self-devotement, and I think that is the most active expression of the human spirit. When a sense of such a mission comes to him a man is reduced to pure action. Something he dare not resist possesses the soul, and when he hears the imperative voice calling, he is obliged to answer: "Here am I, send me."

If we may know the exact moment when a man is fully grown, it is in such an experience. That

is the meaning of a call; the assumption of a life task. When hardships are discounted and fears and hesitations are put behind him, and the man comes forth and gives himself — that is the moment when he is wholly God's. And from this moment Isaiah was definitely on the Lord's side. He never, as was the habit of some prophets, questioned his calling, neither did he ever find fault with the Divine program; his surrender was complete, final and absolute.

We have now to consider the nature of his commission. Indeed it was a disappointing task, and one that would have broken the spirit of a weaker man. He is to deliver a message that will harden the people. Instead of finding them ready for it, he must be prepared to see them disbelieve it, reject it contemptuously and under his ministry grow less instead of more receptive. Their eyes it will gum up, and their ears it will stop, and their hearts it will becloud. The first discovery of a true prophet is the obstinacy of the people. The first illusion he loses is that because a thing is true, the people will believe it. Paul thought so, on his return to Jerusalem after his conversion; the young minister believes it about his first congregation; every great servant of society has begun his career with this illusion, and lost it just as Isaiah did. Truth in some quarters has no market value; the voice of wisdom cries unheeded on the corners of the

street. No wonder the young man exclaimed when he realized the nature of his mission: "O Lord, how long?" and was told a more distressing thing: until the nation is worn out by wars and disasters, and nothing is left but a remnant, a mere stump of the parent tree. This was a discouraging prospect, but it has ever been the rôle of prophets to face this very thing. People are often obstinate, vain, and foolish in the presence of their real leaders; they love delusions, and like Israel, prefer the hot wadies of Palestine to the cool snows of Lebanon that never fail. Above all they fear the austerity of truth and love to take refuge in a world of make-believe. Isaiah's people would not think; more stupid than the ox and the ass, they had no sense whatever of gratitude for the Divine mercies. Even their religion was offensive to God — this temple treading, senseless shouting, and vain posturing in the house of worship — making the fact that they were the chosen people a reason for shutting their eyes to what might happen to them in the Assyrian war. Sterner measures were needed. They must be forced to live in a harder, more uncomfortable world; they must be driven out of their nests into the arena; above all they must be made to *feel* the heat of the tremendous fire that was even then burning about them.

Isaiah must prepare himself for misunderstanding; he must face the contempt of the crowd, stand

in jeopardy of his life, and for a season be content to fail. He must resolve to put his young feet on the steep path of holy devotion that leads to the heights; he must accept the rôle of loneliness and glory; stand there on the frontiers of eternity and see things clearly which the people saw not at all, until that holy seed, for which and in whose interests God was then sifting the wheat from the chaff, had been brought to a state of spiritual soundness and sturdy faith.

There is much here of timely importance for our age. The chief defect of our religious life — a characteristic of the activities of the modern church — has been ignorance of God. We have almost lost the sense of God's glorious austere holiness; and so abused the idea of love that we have behaved as if God were indifferent to moral distinctions. Our worship has been vitiated by unreality, irreverence and unconscious hypocrisy; and in rare moments of spiritual sensibility we have endeavored to escape the influence of Divine holiness by riotous indulgence in revivalism or ritual performances which put the conscience to sleep with sacramentarian anodynes. Like the people of Isaiah's time, we did not care to think much about religion, preferring impressionistic titillations of the emotions to the spiritually transforming power of deep and sustained reflection.

Making little of the holiness of God it is not surprising that we have persistently undervalued the

saving mercy of Jesus Christ. It is useless to preach a gospel of salvation to a people who do not believe they need it; and nothing has ever made men conscious of this need like a fresh sense of Divine holiness. Because our knowledge of holiness has been small, our estimate of Christ has been defective. We have permitted Him to reign over a rather remote and ineffective world we call the future; but we have not allowed Him to govern or be sovereign in the work-a-day world of conduct, or in the control of our deeper allegiances. On this account all sense of austerity has gone out of modern life. We have believed in a comfortable world because we liked to live at ease in Zion. We have grown fat and sleek in body, but lean of soul; and put outside activities and noisy propaganda in place of the inner sanctities of life.

All this have we done, and been all the while indifferent to God's gentler measures. Was ever a passage more descriptive of the delusions of a democracy infatuated with unregulated idealisms, intoxicated by its superficial successes, and blind to the deeper implications of modern political history, than this of Isaiah of a people whose eyes are gummed up, and whose ears are stopped, and whose understandings are befogged by truth that was meant to save them? There seems to be in this country a well-defined notion that God exists solely for our own purposes and ends. Have we not been

told in recent days by an adventurous young doctor of philosophy that if God wishes to retain the allegiance of humanity, He must adapt His ways to the requirements of modern democracy?

It has been a good world for predatory animals, but no fit place for spirits who are to live forever. And then came the German ax crashing down through our flimsy shelters, and our ease and security left us. The cold clean winds are blowing the sickly effluvia of our sensuous existence away from the soul. The old comfort-loving world has gone — for this generation — gone forever, and we find ourselves in a more stimulating atmosphere. Shall we imagine that God is going to withdraw this purging discipline from us until we are clean? Think you He cares more for our comfort than for our spiritual satisfaction? Dare we go back to our buying and selling, our eating and drinking and misdoing, when Europe has been bled white in holy strife? I tell you, No! If you ask the prophet's question: "O Lord, how long?" the answer is plainly: until the holy seed is purged, cleansed, and fitted for its spiritual mission. Isaiah calls the holy seed a remnant, but he never uses this word in a quantitative sense, as if the results of the sifting process were small. In fact it is an idea of large qualitative meaning, and is naturally developed in the book of Revelation into a great multitude whom no man can number. When we think of the variety

of races and peoples who took part in the great war; when we consider the multitudes who are to-day experimenting with government in search of a more legitimate self-expression we are really looking upon an enlarged phase of God's educational work.

The world has not been inclined to consider this aspect of its history, infatuated as it was with private aims or restricted national ambitions, and greatly taken up with notions of evolutionary progress; on which account it has been a lonely place for the prophetic soul. Men were not willing to heed gentler measures of correction; sterner trials were required, and now they have come upon us. In the tremendous changes incident to the world convulsion we find ourselves without the old shelters and sensible of the inaptitude of ancient traditions and established customs; but thank God with all this, *we are alive*.

The German ax — God's instrument — has done its work. Our flimsy shelters are destroyed, and we have been surprised to learn that we are capable of a hardier, sterner life in the wide open world of thought and experience. At great cost have we been permitted to come to ourselves, to discover our inner fineness; the war has given us an opportunity of turning our inchoate idealism into sober fact, and to holy souls who have staked their all upon a spiritual view of life, and who are willing to follow the Captain of Salvation even into the furnace of



dynamic righteousness, the times are bringing consecration robes; they stand before us as awakening ministers of grace, calling for sacrifice, and self-devotement, but bidding us assume a task in the reconstruction of the world which can have but one ending, namely the permanent satisfaction of the soul.

Through the sacrifices of the war, and in the mighty problems incident to the period of readjustment God once more is invading man's life in search of a larger expression of His will. To those who are sensible of this great opportunity there can be but one attitude, that of intelligent and resolute coöperation. Burn on, O Divine fire, until all dross is purged away! Blow, ye icy winds from the cool snows of Lebanon, until all poisonous atmospheres are cleansed from the soul! Rise, O terrible smoke, until the messenger of mercy comes through thee! Make clean our lips and open our hearts that we may have a sense of mission! Call, us, O Lord, with an unescapable imperative until we range ourselves with those who are forever committed to a campaign of righteousness; and make us comrades with those, who like Isaiah have exchanged the fear of man for the fear of God, and have found in the vision of holiness a pathway to the eternal peace!

## CHAPTER III

### THE STALENESS OF THE YEARS

Isaiah v:1: "Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard."

THE measure of a people's receptivity is ability to understand direct speech. If one has to resort to indirect methods, it indicates either a low grade of intelligence, or a mentality calloused by moral eccentricity. There was no lack of intelligence in Judah during Isaiah's time, but all the same the people were quite incapable of understanding direct speech simply because they did not like to think. It was the lament of all the prophets of those times that God's people were perishing for lack of knowledge, not because the supply of truth was limited, but on account of the low receptivity of the nation. God plainly told Isaiah that his preaching would harden the people; their eyes it would gum up, their ears it would stop, and their understandings it would becloud. This was not a judicial blindness for God meant the prophet's preaching for the people's good; the hardening was the direct result of their mental condition. Truth is after all more deadly than

falsehood, for if you determine not to receive it, especially when you suspect that it is truth, it will harden the mind more quickly than falsehood. God has no respect for the swinish mind, and when such a condition results, the only thing left is to look to the painful logic of facts to awaken the people.

This was Isaiah's task, as indeed it was that of his contemporaries. He was obliged to teach for years, often by the most indirect methods, since it was useless to make a frontal attack on the people's ignorance, without seeing any result save the hardening of the mind, and the shutting of the eyes to facts, so plain they seem to us that a child could understand them.

Two facts of portentous significance distinguish this period: one the presence of such prophets among the people, the other the Assyrian invasion of Palestine. Amos and Hosea in the north, Isaiah and Micah in the south, agreed in their teaching and met with the same rejection. Amos argued: "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? . . . Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" The presence of men with such a message was significant of great events impending; yet these people remained defiant, contemptuous, and

indifferent to every effort made to enlighten them. The other fact, equally significant, was the presence of the Assyrian in Palestine. Long before the terrible armies of that ruthless foe had entered the promised land, these prophets saw what it would mean to the country, and they labored in and out of season to rouse the people. Any one can see the danger now, but they did not see it then because of the peculiar state of their minds. And if they appear to us singularly obtuse, what shall we say of Britain and America which persistently failed to see anything dangerous in the military preparations of Germany? We too had our prophets, still it is clear that Germany took the world by surprise, and for precisely the same reason that made both Israel and Judah blind to the menace of Assyria.

We have then to inquire into the pre-war stage of Judean life; we must seek an explanation of this culpable blindness in a peculiar state of mind. More than a century after Isaiah's time, Habakkuk used a phrase that accurately describes it. He called it the staleness of the years; that is, a state of mind originating in a condition of life that had continued for such an indefinite time as to become familiar, customary, and routine; wherein all vital forces had gone out of the thinking of the age, where its habits of life and manner of thought were accepted as matters of course, in which its status in the world was taken for granted. The result of such

a condition is that a kind of staleness comes over the human spirit, a loss of initiative, an inability to criticize one's self; especially the unwillingness to change one's habits of living. This does not imply the absence of vitality in a nation, but only that the currents of life run in clear-cut, well defined channels, and by refusing to seek new outlets, become sluggish and dull of apprehension.

The practical effect of such a state of mind is to close it to all new impressions. It becomes parochial and provincial, the slave of tradition. Its creed is: "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end." If this state of mind was characteristic of the people of Judah before the Assyrian invasion, it was also common to the peoples of Great Britain and America before the German outbreak. A great, world-devastating war, men said, was impossible in the enlightened twentieth century; this was asserted, not on the ground of careful investigation, but in obedience to certain customary ways of thinking and feeling about ourselves. The stale mentality of our time refused to entertain any conception that was contrary to custom, or disturbed our comfortable view of the world. We measured ourselves by ourselves, and compared ourselves with ourselves, and were simply indifferent to any new truth that might destroy our placid, Bœotian contentment. The attitude of these countries towards the few enlightened men who

tried to arouse them to the danger, is proof of this. Men like Lord Roberts preached preparedness in Great Britain for years; the great giant was slightly disturbed, enough perhaps, to be thoroughly angry with her faithful servant, and then complacently turned over and went to sleep again, until she was thoroughly aroused by the German guns on the Belgian frontier. Zephaniah describes this condition of mind in a trenchant criticism of his time: God "will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees; that say in their heart, 'The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.'"

This disease was epidemic in Isaiah's time. Material for its proof is abundant: I can only here select certain characteristic features of the life of the age to show what I mean, and in doing so, must treat the problem and the prophets of Israel and Judah together, for what Isaiah found in Judah was common in Israel also. The great souls, standing on the frontiers of eternity, seeing only God and His mighty ways in history, were obliged to labor with a people so calloused by custom as to be indifferent to the facts before their eyes; so muddled as to the nature of God and meaning of religion as to offer themselves to a cleansing discipline as a parched field begs for rain.

Isaiah understood the issue of events; the Assyrian ax was coming to cut off superfluous growths on the

beloved vine, but before he could bring home this tremendous truth to the calloused conscience of the people he must awaken them to their internal dangers; he must justify the ways of God by convincing them that their social, moral, and spiritual condition demanded a purging discipline. That he was obliged to take indirect methods in doing this clearly indicates the widespread epidemic of this stale mentality, this contented dullness, which all but proved the destruction of the chosen people.

Isaiah traced the staleness of mind to the long peace which the Israelites had enjoyed. Until the Assyrian advance, Palestine had never, save in one instance, been invaded by a great world power. The people knew nothing of world politics, nor had they ever had experience with a mighty empire seeking conquest by actual destruction of small nations. They were familiar of course with war, but it was tribal war, either with their heathen neighbors, or with themselves. Such disturbances were familiar, commonplace, and therefore to be taken for granted; because of familiarity with this sort of strife, tribal wars were comparatively unimportant. In fact war meant to this people, episodic conflicts of a small and inconsequential character; of war on a great scale they knew nothing. On this account it was easy to ignore such things, and practically to form their views of national and political life on a peaceful model.

We understand this sort of thing. You will recall how common it was a few years ago to refer to the twentieth century as the peaceful century; it was frequently asserted that war among great nations was rapidly becoming impossible; how arbitration, peace conferences, and the general excellence of human nature so highly developed under the inspiring forms of modern government, were soon to make war unthinkable; yet there were certain events that were not considered at all. There have been many wars among civilized peoples in the past thirty years; they could be ignored, however, because we could afford to take them for granted; they were all little wars, with which we were quite familiar, mere colonial affairs, which did not affect the general viewpoint. Because we were accustomed to this type we could afford to dismiss it from our calculations. Now this was the way Judah felt about war. Discounting tribal strife, for all intents and purposes Isaiah's generation had grown up without knowing defeat, invasion, or any of the privations of real war.

The long peace had coincided with the reigns of two great men whose military and constructive genius had raised their nations to a higher standard of external excellence than had been enjoyed by the chosen people since Solomon's time. Uzziah in Judah for fifty years, and Jeroboam the Second in Israel for over forty years had dominated the



imagination and shaped the patriotic ideals of their age. During such a long period of tranquillity, the nations were able to live in comparative security; men's thoughts tended to move in fixed channels, they became accustomed to certain ways of thinking about themselves; and as the period was prolonged these habits fixed the character of the age, and closed its mind to all disturbing impressions.

This stale mentality was further encouraged by another factor which coincided with the era of peace. For more than a century Israel and Judah had been undergoing profound and subtle changes. This people, originally nomads, vinedressers, and shepherds gradually developed through an agricultural to a commercial stage of life. They became aware of the natural resources of their country, especially its singularly favorable location on the world's greatest trade routes; villages became towns, towns grew into cities, and the population passed from a rural to an urban state of life. The long peace, under the direction of their able rulers brought this development to a climax and ushered in an era of great prosperity. As Isaiah remarked, the whole land was full of silver and gold; traders, merchants, directors of caravans, foreign business men, developers of infant industries, and the rapid expansion of material interests in all directions tended to conform the life of the times to a com-

mercial mold; moreover it determined the conception of the state. The sturdy peasant of former times disappears and the well-dressed pushful city man takes his place. Isaiah's description of the life of that age reminds us of our modern cities. There are the crowded streets, the strange noises, the fashionable processions through the highways, the traffic in the bazaars; and most significant, the presence here of a motley crowd of foreigners, for it is an inevitable consequence of commercial development that there should be a mixing of races. If you have wares to sell you must find markets; the need brought Israel into the closest possible contact with other nations, and this in turn caused other nations to react in the most effectual way upon the manners and customs of this hitherto isolated people. We witness the rapid infiltration of foreign fashions, dress and modes of living, in one word — luxury. The old life had been rude, simple, close to the soil; this new life was more delicate, refined, and complex, and of course more expensive; and this developed needs of an æsthetic kind, hitherto foreign to the Hebrew taste: for adornment, luxurious homes, and house furnishings, for splendid equipage and lavish entertainment. In short we see in the middle of the eighth century the rapid transformation of the descendants of the rude old settlers of the land into a polite society of a strikingly modern type. This fixed the dominant

passion of the people to refine, improve, and cultivate the outside of life; to mold it after that of other nations, to the neglect and inevitable corruption of the inner life. It was an age in which men moved heaven and earth to make money, while the women did all they could to spend it in lavish and extravagant ways. We meet here for the first time with the shrewd trickster in business, the parasite woman, and the gilded follies of a smart set. Well did Hosea describe it in a mordant epigram: "Ephraim is a cake not turned," a state of society divided into hostile classes, "with large appetites and no dinners at one extreme, and large dinners and no appetites at the other." The land was full of the extravagant pageantry of society, state and even the church; for here too was a chance to make religious custom conform to the expanding life and the true religion was mixed up with much that was foreign and false. It is true that Israel had done this before, but never with such passionate eagerness and æsthetic subtlety as now. The Temple was crowded at all hours — Temple treaders — Isaiah called them; there was lavish display, and much singing and posturing; while you could hardly look in any direction without seeing in the streets, the soothsayer, the diviner, the priest of a foreign superstition, or some wandering philosopher with strange intellectual wares for sale; while yonder on the hills were the pillars and groves of many an

obscene cult. The land was full of silver and gold; full too of foreign idols, of men with lofty looks and women with haughty eyes; and everywhere the talk was the same, of optimism, prosperity, millenniums of glory and the golden age just ahead.

The nation was proud and stiff-necked; it had outward reason to be so, for was it not a great country? Did it not have able rulers, and was it not rich, prosperous and well groomed? There was always something going on; there was much noise of the builders, the streets were crowded with traffic, there was plenty of amusement and pleasure; above all, plenty of religion: for was not Israel and Judah the chosen of God? Did not Jehovah exist primarily for the protection of these elect peoples? What then should they care about the Assyrian advance, for the ravings of an inexperienced youth who mistook his adolescent moods for prophetic insight? Had they not subdued Gaza, and sometimes Damascus; and was Assyria any more dangerous than these? Precisely as if one had said in our time: Did we not subdue the Boers, or Spain, and is Germany to be feared more than these peoples?

Indeed it was a difficult task to enlighten such people as these, whose eyes were gummed up and whose ears were stopped because their minds were stale. As one reads the story of Judah's social decay, together with her appalling lack of receptivity, it makes one feel as if one were looking into

a modern banquet hall after the feasters have left it. The atmosphere of staleness is over all; the foul stench of cigarette smoke, the sickly animal smell of congested chambers, the paralyzing dullness of the after-dinner speeches still clogging the mind — the staleness of the years with Assyria rolling down upon the land one hundred miles away, and round it all to the vision of the prophet, the blinding fire of that holy atmosphere — God!

Let us see what Isaiah and his contemporaries thought of this condition of affairs. Take his description of the seven-fold wickedness of the people. There is the land-sin — the passion to add house to house and field to field for the purpose of acquiring an added importance in the community; the desire for the summer house and the winter house; the wish for the small farm-steading of the sturdy peasant who is away to the wars, that you may have an estate and call it after your name and be one of the great of the land. Then too, there was the inevitable effect of idleness — drunkenness and dissipation. In a refined society no gentleman will get drunk before dinner, but these near-gentlemen of a *parvenu* aristocracy got drunk in the morning and remained so until late at night, using music and dancing — that last resort of vacuous minds, the cabaret show of modern times — to stimulate the passion for pleasure. These people were drawing iniquity with cart ropes, and in their drunken

frenzy saying, "Let the Assyrian come on, that we may see him; fetch him out that we may smash him," and even with sodden leers winking at God over their shoulders, as if He enjoyed the scene! There were others who called evil good, and good evil; the peddling dilettanti of ancient times, who with Nietzsche-like subtlety knew how to substitute cleverness for truth, preferring the making of an obscene epigram to the doing of a decent thing: insectiferous minds whose maggot thoughts are bred in the tropical atmospheres of corrupt society. There were men who made a god of prudence; sharp fellows on the stock exchange who knew how to get hold of a good thing. There were judges, too, who never gave decisions unless they were bribed, and gossipers whose tongues ran like fire among stubble; whose mouths, to use Heine's phrase, were "veritable guillotines of reputations; who never closed their incisive jaws that some venerable head did not fall into the basket." And among them all, encouraging the loose tendencies of the time, were despisers of the word of God. Amos saw other things; men panting after the dust on the heads of suppliants, so land hungry were they; ready to sell the needy for a pair of shoes, and sleeping in the house of God on garments torn from the shivering backs of widows, whose men had died in defense of the land.

A strangely modern world, this, my masters, and here is a remarkable thing. The sins denounced

by the prophets are the sins of aristocrats, of the successful of the earth. The human race may be divided into shepherds and sheep. Most people have to remain sheep all their lives, and God has never been greatly concerned about their behavior. But He has been particularly interested in the behavior of the shepherds, the leaders of men. Christ was interested in the doings of the sheep, and the misdoings of the shepherds. He praised the widow's mite; His parables abound in the doings of the poor; He talks a great deal of the least, the last, and the lost. But when He speaks of the shepherds, the leaders and molders of public opinion, He is concerned with their misdoings; and solemnly warns them against the deadly sins of hardness, licentiousness, hypocrisy, and slackness; and these are sins to a large extent of cultured leisure.

This point of view is common to the Bible as a whole; and it was this that prompted Isaiah to test the nation's character by three types of leaders: the rulers, the women, and the ministers of religion.

It is probably true, as Lord Palmerston observed, that a nation gets as good a government as it deserves. Isaiah's time witnessed the passing of the old-fashioned ruler, and the coming in of the pushful brazen type. whose only claim to notice was founded upon success. A certain Shebna had, with Tammany-like shrewdness, got himself elected to the office of mayor of the palace. Nobody had

ever heard of him before, nor could any one discover his family relationships. His name did not appear in the social register of the time, but there he was, symbol of a besotted materialism, and this brazen, impudent creature was actually building for himself a magnificent tomb over against the tombs of the prophets; so that he might achieve posthumous fame, as well as earthly success; and why should he not? If success be a criterion of virtue, was he not just as good as David? Isaiah thought not and said to him: "God will hurl thee out of thy position, thou great bladder of a man, and roll thee out into the desert where thou shalt burst with a great noise and disappear; and in thy place He will put a man of character. He will hammer him in, as a nail in a strong place, but beware," said he to that generation, "lest the children of this man hang too much on the overburdened nail and pull it out to their undoing." Here you see the aristocracy of brass pushed out by the aristocracy of brains, which in turn is displaced to the hurt of the nation by the aristocracy of birth. This was the sort of government the people were content to have.

Isaiah's criticism of the fashionable women of the time is very pointed and just. Amos, a rough countryman, had very severe words for the women of Israel, calling them "fat cows of Bashan, that are upon the mountains of Samaria," selfish to the last degree and ready at a moment's notice for



panic. Isaiah was a cultured gentleman and his description is more refined; still it reads like an account of Paris fashions out of *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair*, and what he describes you may see any spring day on the principal streets of our American cities. The point is, not that Isaiah condemned refinement or personal adornment; but that these women thought of nothing else; they lived in an artificial atmosphere of vanity and futility — parasites fattening upon the overstimulated sensuality of a corrupt society — and if the mothers of Israel were to be like this, what was to become of the children?

His criticisms of ministers of religion are even more pointed. Micah with the clarity of a country-bred mind, had cleverly described them as those who for a tangible consideration, were ready to consecrate any enterprise. "Feed us," they seemed to say, "bestow upon us riches, and we will bless your plans," but if you by any chance should withhold the bribe, they stood ready to call down God's curse upon you. Isaiah, more penetratingly shows the false prophet and priest as creatures of a corrupt society, ready to endorse all manner of wickedness, provided it did not interfere with their vested rights and special privileges. Amos gives a striking picture of his encounter with Amaziah, priest of Bethel, and the point of view of Amaziah in contrast with that of the true prophet, throws a vivid light upon the moral confusions of the time. Amaziah has no

conception whatever of a divine mission; prophecy with him is only a means to a good living; it has given him a superior social position, and he resents the intrusion of a competitor, especially this rude countryman from Tekoa, into his private preserve. He assures Amos that he is the minister of the first church of Bethel, it is the king's sanctuary, let him never forget that, and a royal house; that is, the king had a pew in that church, came there occasionally and gave it special distinction. He insists that Amos respect the rights of the craft, return home to Tekoa and make his living there, and come no more to disturb Israel, meaning of course Amaziah and his special privilege. To him Amos replied in an immortal phrase: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman and a dresser of sycamore trees; and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."

Such criticisms show that the real sin of Israel and Judah was callousness of soul. They were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph; they had neither pity for the weak, nor sense of responsibility to the dependent. Is it any wonder then, that Isaiah should find it difficult to arouse them from this contented stupor? Their notion of religion blinded them to their danger. Instead of regarding God's favor as an opportunity for righteous service of the nation, they used it as a cloak for all manner of

wickedness. It was upon this essential hardness of heart which Isaiah traced to their stale minds, that he based his prediction of a coming judgment. The moral and social condition of Judah made the Assyrian invasion a necessity.

Again we are impressed with the modernity of all this, for our nation in most respects has passed through a similar stage of development. Like Israel and Judah, we have known nothing, until recently, of real war. Such wars as we have had were mere colonial affairs, like that of the Revolution or with Spain. The war that has made the deepest impression upon us, the Civil War, has left lines of cleavage and sustained sickly sentimentalities it were wisest for us all soonest to forget. We have been compelled to create a mythology about our past, and surround our favorite heroes with a cloud of myths and legends of an almost supernatural gravity in order to indulge the pleasant illusion that we have had real experiences on the tented field.

Until quite recently, our patriotism has been sectional, capable of expressing itself in episodic ways, and usually in association with some favorite prejudice. The present generation grew up in an atmosphere of peace, unfamiliar with defeat, invasion or any of the horrors of war. Inheriting a series of traditions highly favorable to our self-conceit it is not to be wondered at that we have at times been

bombastic, self-assertive and full of pride. Most of the errors about ourselves have come from this source, notably the fixed attitude, until recently, assumed towards entangling alliances and foreign relations. We had adopted the curious delusion that to say a thing was about the same thing as to do it; because for instance the Monroe Doctrine had never been successfully challenged, we assumed that this bulwark of the Western Hemisphere was based squarely upon our power to sustain it; overlooking of course the painful but salutary truth that had not the policy of Great Britain coincided with ours, the doctrine would have been challenged long ago. As a leading authority on American history, Dr. Latane has recently said: "Had Great Britain adopted a high tariff policy and been compelled to demand commercial concessions from Latin America by force, the Monroe Doctrine would long since have gone by the board and been forgotten."

This singular satisfaction with ourselves — this fixed belief that we had the best political institutions, the most deserving people, and the highest type of civilization blinded us to our true provincialism, and encouraged the growth of a parochial phase of mind which enabled us to measure ourselves by ourselves, and to compare ourselves with ourselves until it was difficult to learn anything from older and more cultured nations.

This curious obsession grew with our passing from an agricultural to a commercial stage of life, leading as it did to an enormous increase of worldly prosperity, and with it unavoidable contact with other nations and the reaction of foreign fashions upon the provincial point of view.

Thus has it come about that with an eager adaptation of our provincial society to foreign customs we have developed a cosmopolitan life characterized by the splendid vices and loose moralities of European countries, rather than by their more worthy and desirable qualities; and the nation has rapidly filled up with all sorts of clever people: vagabond philosophers hawking the rejected wares of older civilizations; frantic females intoxicated with emotional vagaries; attractive immoralists proclaiming a millennium of unrestrained animalism tempered by æstheticism; irresponsible adventurers in the domain of the spirit, advocating political sophistries, strange cults, and curious religions: until it is possible to see in any large American city to-day what Isaiah saw in Jerusalem in the eighth century B. C.

This intense interest in the outside of life blinded us to the essential fineness of the inner nature. It was God's vision of the submerged fineness in Judah that caused Him to send Assyria on her fell mission of destruction; such an experience was needed

to discover it; the gold was there, but it required a refining fire.

Such an awakening has taken place among us; we have become aware of the need of closer relations with the spiritual world, simply because we have learned that we are spirits; unhappily just now we are more interested in impressions than in essential reality; still the newly discovered fineness which has resulted from the sacrifices of the war is a great gain. We have the truth about ourselves, and it will grow; in spite of our superficial materialism we know beyond doubt that the nation is idealistic. The war has purged us of mental staleness, and men everywhere are thinking intensely and thinking straight.

But there is no necessary reason why we should be a better nation as the result of the war; on the contrary if history teaches anything, nations are subject to violent reactions. If this is not to be said of our nation, we must see to it that we make full use of our great but passing opportunity; and that opportunity essentially is neither social nor political, but spiritual. We must rid ourselves of impressionism as quickly as possible, forsake all unsafe guides, have done with half measures; above all we must not fall back into the old ways of thinking about ourselves, but have the courage to face with bare souls, the great cleansing fires of God.

I believe we are sound at heart; I believe in our

capacity for true religion; I have faith that we shall successfully meet the great issues of the war; but my chief ground for hope is that God loves us enough to hurt us, and is willing to bring us through fire and water into the large place of the soul, that we may be fitted for His society.

We must wash our gummed-up eyes with the tears of penitence that we may see; we must open our ears to hear what may give us pain; we must accustom ourselves to the most searching self-examination; we must try to understand the times until we are freed from the tyranny of loose impressions and come in contact with essential reality; we must be willing to leave the frail shelters which the German ax has crushed and live in the cold but invigorating atmosphere of God's austerity. By so doing, we shall exchange the crude provincialism of an earth-centered mind for the true cosmopolitanism of a God-centered personality. It is by great and terrible things that God has answered us. We have sinned against our essential fineness — our spirituality of nature — and it is for this that God has sent us through the cleansing fire. Once accept this discipline with a firm determination to see it through, and we are brought into the spacious atmospheres from which the great prophet is speaking; it is in returning and rest we shall be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall our strength be.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE IRONIC REALISM OF GOD

Isaiah xxviii:13: "Therefore shall the word of the Lord be unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little; that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken."

THE ruling classes in Jerusalem were at first disposed to ignore the prophet's warnings, but circumstances soon changed their feeling into one of tolerant interest.

In the middle of the eighth century, B. C. Palestine, after a long and prosperous peace, was drawn into world politics by the invasion of Assyria. After many years of preparation she began her westward thrust in B. C. 745, with Egypt as her objective. She did not reach her goal, however, until B. C. 672, her military activities covering a period of seventy three years; but during that time her armies were almost constantly in Palestine, and only one kingdom remained at the end that had anything resembling independence. This was due in great measure to the statesmanlike leadership of Isaiah.



Five years after the beginning of the westward movement Isaiah was called to the prophetic office. In the year that king Uzziah died he saw the Lord, and became convinced of the onliness of God and the universal scope of His providence. He believed that sovereignty was rooted in righteousness, and by righteousness he meant no mere static quality of an absentee deity, but an intensely active and dynamic force—an atmosphere of holy fire burning round men and nations and things. Only the real could live in the fire.

From this notable conception he derived two of his most effective convictions. One was that while Assyria could do a great deal of harm to weaker nations, she was doomed to destruction in the end because she was not real; she could not live in the fire. She was therefore just an instrument in the Divine hand; God's ax to carry out His disciplinary purposes. This purging judgment, admittedly terrible in its visible effect, was by virtue of his second conviction, really a manifestation of loving kindness to the chosen people. Judah must go through the fire, but she would come out of it, a refined and beautiful thing.

Still the prophet found it almost impossible in the beginning to rouse the nation to its danger. The long peace, under the administration of Uzziah had coincided with a remarkable commercial and material expansion. The whole land was full of

silver and gold, and as a consequence of luxury and splendid vice. Moreover this development had corrupted the true religion and exposed the people to the machinations of time-serving priests and false prophets. All classes of society were venal. This was particularly true of the rulers and leaders of public opinion. The upper classes were wholly disinclined to take a serious view of the situation. Isaiah's severe condemnation of the fashionable women of the time was not based upon a dislike of culture or outward refinement of life, but because this rank extravagance was a symptom of a deeper disease; it was the sign of a shallow mind and spirit. If the mothers of Israel were content to live for the outside of life, and remained indifferent to its inner soundness, what would the future be? The glittering pageant of outward prosperity blinded the nation to its internal dangers. Its mind was stale and set in fixed channels; it was incapable of receiving instruction; its eyes were gummed up and its ears stopped; even its notion of religion was an additional element of weakness. Nothing short of a terrible experience: something that would hurt and wound, could rouse the nation to its higher mission, for it was deliberately sinning against the light, and in missing truth was wronging its own soul.

As has been indicated the sins denounced by the prophet were those of the aristocrats, leaders, and shepherds of the nation. Instead of using their ad-

vantage for the benefit of the people, they had squandered their resources on pleasures, and were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. In love with lies, terribly afraid of truth, they had become so familiar with religious observances as to forget the very nature of God. The condition of the whole land was such that it called for a purging judgment, as a parched field begs for rain.

Isaiah saw this coming in the Assyrian advance upon Palestine; how then could he awaken the people to their danger? He enjoyed certain advantages not possessed by his contemporaries. Prophets like Amos, a rude countryman, or Micah, a native of a provincial town, had no opportunity of mingling with the influential classes. The people paid little attention to these rank outsiders at the time; only when in the midst of the terrible experiences of the Assyrian invasion did they recall the preaching of these unknown men. But with Isaiah it was different. An aristocrat himself he had close contact with the ruling classes and understood their mental attitude. He was an associate of the king, the intimate companion of princes, diplomats and soldiers, and in full possession of the small talk of their dinner tables. He could form an accurate estimate of their thoughts by considering the unconscious by-play of their minds, in conversations heard or overheard at their social entertainments.

Moreover, in addition to his supreme endowment

as a prophet, Isaiah had a mind of vast range and power; he was a statesman of the first rank and had a clear insight into his times. He could forecast the drift of events before they ripened. More than any of his age, he saw the essential significance of the Assyrian advance, and consistently held up to that generation the danger growing out of its geographical position. Midway between the upper and nether millstone of the Nile and Mesopotamian valleys he was fully alive to the fact that Palestine must become the battleground of mutually antagonistic civilizations. Above all, he knew the weakness of these Palestinian states, complicated as it was by the obstinate stupidity of the rulers, and rightly regarded the policies of his own people as worthless.

These things being so, events developed to the point where it was possible for him to offer suggestions as to what should be done. Then, as now, men settled many important matters around the dinner table, and this twenty eighth chapter is an account of what took place at one of the great state dinners held in Jerusalem.

Certain things had happened to arouse the rulers to their danger. The fall of the great northern fortress at Hamath, the conquest of Damascus, the siege of Tyre which had now been going on for two years, and the gradual approach of Assyria to the walls of Samaria finally forced the rulers of Jerusa-

lem to consider the possibility of a siege of their own city also. At first the slow progress of the Assyrian army, the immense difficulty it encountered in hammering its way to the approaches of Palestine, and the fact that revolts in Babylon required a suspension of the movement from time to time, encouraged the people of Judah to dismiss their fears and shut their ears to the prophet's warnings. Under such conditions it was easy to remain contemptuous and indifferent. But circumstances now altered this view. Assyria's progress was slow but sure, and the people were beginning to be afraid; they began to speak of Assyria as an overflowing scourge, a mighty tidal wave of death and destruction rolling over the land. Measures must be devised for meeting it somehow; so the rulers had a dinner party in Jerusalem to discuss the matter, and fortunately for us, Isaiah was present.

An interesting side light is thrown upon their mental condition by the means selected for the settlement of so serious a matter. It is safe to say that these people were as yet quite hopeful and optimistic, otherwise they would not first have cloyed their bodies with much eating and their brains with much drinking before taking hold of such a problem; and yet, as Isaiah tells it, the fact is plain that these priests, statesmen, and soldiers were drunk before they began their discussion. It was even so with Samaria now within three years of cap-

tivity and destruction; this shows how unfit these men were for leadership in such a crisis.

We shall consider the measures proposed by the rulers, Isaiah's criticisms of them, his remedy, and their final attitude towards his advice.

Four policies were advocated round that dinner table by the soldier, the merchant, the diplomat, and the priest, respectively: fight, pay, parley, pray. The soldier said: "Let us fight the Assyrian," and among them all, he was the best representative of the manhood of the nation. There was, too, some justification of this advice because Hezekiah had then come to the throne and had displayed some military skill and administrative talent, among other things he had materially improved the defensive power of the city. The man of business said: "It is not necessary to fight, it will disturb business too much. It will be better for us all to bribe the Assyrian; it is just a question of money anyway; let us pay him a great tribute and he will pass us by." Now this scheme had worked in the days of Ahaz, who against Isaiah's advice, had invited Assyria to protect him against an invasion from his neighbors. Assyria had promptly accepted the invitation and exacted an enormous tribute; which, while it proved burdensome was regarded by the business interests of the country as the less of two evils. Better, they thought, to be in bondage to Assyria than have war with their neighbors, and the

weak king was willing to have peace at any price. The men of business now proposed to continue this policy even though they had to increase the bribe, rather than jeopardize the business interests of the country by a war-like resistance of the Assyrian thrust. The diplomat, however, was willing neither to fight nor pay. He had another scheme and proposed an alliance with Egypt. This old nation under the leadership of a resourceful king had recently taken on new life and was making a great deal of superficial preparation for war. It seemed quite the proper thing for Judah to ally herself with Egypt especially as ambassadors from that country had been in Jerusalem advocating this new thing; and in all likelihood some were sitting at that very table. The priest, however, was of the opinion that nothing should be done; it was better to let well enough alone. Everybody knew that Judah was under the protection of God; He had never in the past permitted a heathen nation to destroy the chosen people and there was no reason why they should think so now. To assert such a possibility was blasphemy; besides were they not even then living in a glorious time? Were they not prosperous, cultured and religious, and did they not have plenty of accomplished priests to guide them? Let the people trust in God and all would be well. Such were the views of national policy discussed between courses at this banquet in Jerusalem.

Whether he was there by invitation or not, we have no means of knowing; but Isaiah was present and listened patiently to all that was said; and then he ventured to offer some criticisms of the policies proposed.

To the soldier he said: "I admire your courage but I cannot praise your judgment, for you ought to know that Judah is not in a position to meet Assyria in the open. We are a small people, our army is accustomed only to tribal warfare, but this Assyrian campaign is something entirely different. It is a movement of a first class world power, with methods of unusual warfare and almost boundless resources; our soldiers cannot successfully resist it on any terms." To the suggestion of the business men that the danger be met by tribute, he said: "I am in favor of continuing the tribute promised by Ahaz, since to withhold it will invite disaster; but I am opposed to increasing it, for it is useless to expect this dishonorable and truce-breaking nation to keep its promises. No amount of money can check the Assyrian's headlong passion for world dominion; and any treaty we might make with him would be only a "scrap of paper." As for the suggestion that we make an offensive alliance with Egypt, nothing could be more unwise. Can you not see that Egypt even under the most favorable conditions is no match for Assyria in the field? Are you not aware that Assyria's objective is the



conquest of Egypt and that we are involved only because we happen to be in the way of this movement? Is it not clear to you that it is to Egypt's advantage to retard the Assyrian advance as much as possible, and that it is highly expedient for her to use us as buffer states? You think she is strong because she is old; you are doubtless impressed with her feverish military activity, and the specious eloquence of her ambassadors; but do not be deceived; the purpose of Egyptian diplomacy is to involve us with Assyria and slow up her advance; besides, Egypt is a moribund nation, a blustering braggart whose strength is to sit still. She excels in promises and seems quite capable so long as she is inactive; but when her armies meet those of Assyria she will prove her utter ineffectiveness; her strength is to sit still, to remain inactive as long as possible; but when she moves she will break in pieces, and if you fall in with this alliance you will break with her." As for the advice of the priests he said: "On the face of it, it is good counsel, for nothing is so important just now as a genuine return unto the Lord; but can you not see that this priestly advice carries with it no promise whatever of reform; that the corruption of the nation, the rank hypocrisy of priest and prophet, the complete secularization of religion are unmistakable evidences of your profound ignorance of God; and that the fact so greatly trusted in by these false religious

guides — that Judah is under the protection of Jehovah — so far from giving you immunity from the coming discipline, makes you tenfold more the object of it? Because you are the Lord's chosen people, He will punish you for all your sins. Do not put your trust in any of these policies, for I tell you plainly they will lead to your destruction."

"What then," asked these well fed gentlemen, "is *your* remedy for these evils?" And Isaiah answered: "A real return unto God. Do you not see that these things are coming on you because of your wickedness? Your silver has become dross, and your wine is mixed with water; your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loveth bribes, and followeth after rewards; they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. Why should ye be stricken anymore? The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Wash you, and make you clean, put away the evil of your doings; learn to do well; seek judgment, and relieve the oppressed. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Your safety lies in repentance: in returning and rest shall

ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall your strength be; for God has laid in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, tried and precious; through you as with no other people can He realize His righteous purposes in the world; therefore He will not permit Assyria to destroy a nation with such responsibility as this. The Assyrian will do much mischief; you will suffer loss of goods, you will be driven out of the comfortable shelters that have proved your spiritual undoing, into the cold clean winds of God's austerity; but it will arouse you to the essential fineness of your nature, which in quieter times you have despised; it will bring you back to holiness and righteousness, to love and loyalty; and in these things shall your strength be. God will burn you with the same fire that shall ultimately destroy Assyria; but you will come out of it a refined and beautiful thing, fit for His society and ready for your great religious mission. Do not then shrink from this discipline like a lot of cowards, do not run from the Hand whose very heaviness just now proves its love; accept the discipline bravely and openly, and you will become a people worthy of Divine confidence."

This was great advice and we can easily see how wisely presented. How did they receive it? They rejected it with the utmost contempt on the ground that it was childish, familiar, and commonplace. "You speak to us," they said, "as if we were a lot

of nurslings; precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little;" mere kindergarten talk. The contemptuous monotony of this reply can best be realized if we use Professor Whitehouse's translation: "law on law, law on law, saw on saw, saw on saw; a bittie here and a bittie there."

Their objection was that instead of novel ideas to meet an admittedly great situation the man of God came with something that had been familiar from childhood: a foolish suggestion about repentance, and the like; religion forsooth and church going, and prayer and faith, as if they did not know all about this sort of thing.

Now while it is true that they were familiar with Isaiah's *words*, they did not comprehend the first principles of what he meant; and they missed it, as we usually do, simply because truth had become familiar and nothing else. Most of the fundamental principles of life, especially those that have to do with moral and spiritual experience are common and familiar truths; but they are not on that account less important. In some ways the commonness of a truth is the measure of its value to mankind.

Cicero remarked of the men of his time, "that instead of trying as they ought to make themselves strange to the familiar, they strive on the contrary to make themselves familiar with the strange;" and this is a good description of the mental attitude

taken towards religious advice by the cultivated people of Isaiah's age. They did not know what the prophet meant by religion; for religion to them had come to mean, first and last, novelty, newness, ritual and ceremony; something fresh, splendid and ornate.

They went among foreign peoples with a disordered imagination and borrowed new religious customs; new kinds of incense and new altars, and new fangled church decorations. There were high church and low church and broad church notions abounding; and new gods and goddesses from Damascus and Tyre, and Gaza and Egypt. They patronized all sorts of frauds: soothsayers and diviners, wandering philosophers and unfrocked priests, and delighted in the knavery and humbuggery that goes with a cloyed intelligence and a besotted soul; while such fundamentals as truth telling and cleanness of mind, righteous dealing with neighbors and a saving sense of the reality of God were dismissed because they were familiar and commonplace. Dives was such a man. He was quite familiar with Moses and the prophets, and demanded some new thing — a man rising from the dead — for instance as an evidence of religious reality. Such people who perish from excess of light, expect a private entrance to the kingdom of heaven; but for truth, and righteousness and purity of soul, they have no taste, and usually dismiss the prophet because he is dealing with some-

thing so trite and familiar that it savors of nursery talk.

And for the moment Isaiah's hearers tried to get rid of him and his unpleasant advice. But he came back at them: "Very well: you do not like my message; you reject it because you have heard it before; then listen: the time will soon come when God will speak to you in another way. When you hear the steady thump of the battering rams on your mud walls, and the stammering tongues of a strange and mighty people about your city — the Assyrian at your gates, and you, in spite of your tribute and your Egyptian alliance, in utter paralysis — then O proud people, you will recall my words, and become aware of their truth; then you will discover the terrible realism of the commonplace and familiar, the strange irony of God: law on law, saw on saw, a bittie here and a bittie there; and when you realize it you will stumble and fall backward; your military policy will collapse, your diplomacy will disappoint you and your religion will prove a refuge of lies."

Isaiah's teaching amounts to this that if men will not learn God's will by precept, they must realize it through bitter experience. That is why disillusion plays so large a part in practical education. The contemptuous attitude often taken towards familiar truth, so far from indicating superior culture, is in reality a symptom of fear. It is the habit of the coward to boast of his courage as it

is of the ignorant to brag about his knowledge. An impressionist who is afraid to face the deeps of life may dismiss the prophet's words, but he must reckon eventually with the disillusioning fact. The word of truth may stop the ears, but the commonplace event will open them again: that is why true prophets must wait for the vindication of history.

Twenty five years later the impressionists of Jerusalem were brought face to face with the disenchanting fact. Assyria did everything Isaiah said she would do. The soldiers with the aid of Arabian mercenaries tried to meet her in the field and were put to rout; the business man endeavored to bribe her: she took his money, but the treaty turned out to be a covenant with death and hell; the diplomat made his alliance with Egypt; Egypt broke down and chaos arrived on schedule time; while the priest was among the first to abandon all hope, counsel the people to a "riotous folly of despair" and vanish into outer darkness. The streets of the holy city were filled with a disorderly crowd of soldiers without arms, of diplomats who had forgotten their dignity, of business men without their strong boxes, and false prophets with white faces and palsied limbs; while everywhere were mobs of frantic fools shouting, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die;" and the great prophet looking upon it all with noble scorn and saying: "What aileth thee now, O Judah? Hath it not come to pass even as I said?"

Isaiah had insisted that some of God's most important revelations come through the medium of the commonplace. What for instance could be more familiar than the word "holiness," but the idea it conveyed in the prophet's teaching was entirely new. Holiness, to the impressionistic Hebrew meaning little more than ceremonial purity, had to do with a familiar ritual; but holiness in Isaiah's teaching meant an active, dynamic righteousness — an atmosphere of fire, burning ceaselessly about men and nations and things, which was the only test of reality. This vital element stood like a curtain of flame between Assyria and Judah; it was the sole guarantee of Jerusalem's inviolability; but Judah's rulers refused to believe in it on the ground that it was commonplace, and because they preferred the more novel suggestions of hypocritical diplomats and time-serving priests. There was nothing left but to wait for the issue of events. What they refused to learn from commonplace precepts, they came to understand through commonplace experience.

In ordinary times it is the habit of impressionists to prefer what is new or novel, to that which is familiar. This is the peculiar vice of the cultivated intellect. When it leaves the narrow domain of its professional interests to range the spacious atmospheres of the world, it is often cursed with excessive credulity. The common mind, that has not enjoyed the doubtful advantage of a utilitarian culture



is usually conservative; it is accustomed to find vital wisdom in the familiar facts of life. Experience teaches it caution. But under certain conditions a modern doctor of philosophy will believe anything. The easiest place to develop a new cult or novel superstition is a university campus. As a rule modern educational methods produce trained minds rather than disciplined personalities; and such, for want of something to vary the monotony of professional pursuits will often fall into the error that Cicero condemned when he said that the disposition of cultured men of his time was "instead of trying as they ought to make themselves strange to the familiar, they strove, on the contrary to render themselves familiar with the strange."

But suppose we exchange the commonplaces of religion for the novelties of modern skepticism, what do we gain? We leave a world wherein the familiar is occasionally lit with the gleam of eternity; where commonplace experience is glorified by personal relations to the living and holy God; where intellectual progress is sanctified by reverence for a Being whose will and ways are becoming intelligible, for the deadly routine of general laws, or the cold companionship of abstract principles, camouflaged here and there with such vagaries as psychical research: which leaves the soul under the malign spell of unknown forces, and at the mercy of spook doctors, and neurotic adventurers in the domain of the spirit.

The exchange of a prophet's commonplace advice, for the irresponsible novelties of a spiritualistic medium is a very poor bargain; yet this was done by many apparently balanced minds when caught unawares in the terrible storm of a world war.

Impressionism is responsible for the fact that Germany took the world by surprise. We were so occupied with illusions about the progress of twentieth century civilization that we could form no reasonable estimate of what was going on. Germany's collapse was due, in great measure, to her failure to reckon with the constant pressure of moral forces; she ventured into the domain of the spirit blindly trusting to organized materialism; and she failed because experience, whether for nations or individuals, is always on the side of truth. Life brings home its meaning at the last; and we shall do well, in the reconstruction period, to give force to this tremendous fact. The world is in an atmosphere of fire, which determines the reality of all created things; it may for the moment be ignored or forgotten because it manifests itself in familiar ways; but if we are to meet successfully the responsibilities of the present time we must learn how to make ourselves strange to the familiar, that is to consider the hidden significance of the ordinary processes of life, and derive our strength and encouragement from belief in a God whose ways are commonplace only because they are constant.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DOOM OF MATERIAL EFFICIENCY

Isaiah x: 12: "Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks."

IN the last chapter we reviewed some of the ways by which the rulers of Judah proposed to deal with the Assyrian, should they be so unfortunate as to fall into his hands. Four measures were suggested: fight, pay, parley, pray. Isaiah rejected them on the ground that they did not meet the situation, and proposed reliance upon the fundamental promises which God had made to the chosen people: God had laid in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, tried and precious; the spiritual destiny of the world having been entrusted to this nation, it was not the purpose of God to permit Assyria to destroy its autonomy at this time. But Judah must mend her ways and return unto the Lord. "Come back," said the prophet, "to the old simplicity of life and faith, and God will sustain you."

The rulers scornfully rejected this advice on the ground that it was familiar and commonplace; they denounced the prophet for treating them as if they

were children: precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little, mere kindergarten talk. The prophet reminded them that a time was coming when God would speak to them in another way. When they heard the strange voices of the Assyrian host about their city, then it should be to them: precept upon precept, line upon line; they should go, and fall backward, and be taken.

Such reasoning in the light of subsequent events is quite convincing, but for the moment it did not interest the rulers in Jerusalem, because the danger seemed far distant. It is true that the Assyrian was slowly but surely advancing; already he had overrun northern Syria, taken Damascus and was even then besieging Tyre and feeling the approaches to Samaria; but up there in her remote mountain fastness Jerusalem felt herself secure.

Four years later the situation had materially changed. After a prolonged and terrible siege Samaria had fallen. The bulk of her population was taken away captive to Mesopotamia and her political autonomy completely destroyed. The Assyrian army intoxicated with victory now lay only two days' march from the borders of Judah and a little more than two days from Jerusalem itself. It was a terrible awakening for the complacent rulers of the city, and they feverishly began to devise measures for meeting the crisis.

The most popular measures suggested were a

treaty with Assyria based on tribute, and an alliance with Egypt. Some years previously, Ahaz had made a treaty with Assyria for self-protection against his northern neighbors, and, since then, the nation had been paying an annual tribute; many said that the easiest way of avoiding trouble was to trust to this agreement. Assyria must keep her covenant promises, even though it might involve an increase in the yearly bribe. But Isaiah had called this agreement a "covenant with death and hell," Assyria was not to be depended upon, and where her interests were involved, the most solemn treaties were but "scraps of paper," to be torn up at her convenience. It is clear that this was the secret fear of the rulers, for the more popular policy advocated was an offensive alliance with Egypt; and whatever military campaigns were determined, were made on the assumption that Judah would be supported by an Egyptian contingent. But of Egypt Isaiah had plainly said: "She is a blustering braggart, whose strength is to sit still." The outstanding feature of the situation was that the rulers had no idea of reliance upon God. The moral aspect of the crisis made no appeal to them, neither had the prophet's advice impressed them. They were without adequate religious supports and their mental state was so confused that they were incapable of understanding or following the only man who could have led them out of the difficulty.

We turn now to consider how Isaiah faced the crisis. All great convictions begin with visions: first by a flash of intuition a man gains insight into truth, then events develop intuitions into conscious and workable convictions, which in turn may be used to interpret a situation. This is what we see in the notable tenth chapter.

The source of Isaiah's convictions was his prophetic call. In the year that king Uzziah died he saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, and by a flash of insight, came to understand the true sovereignty of the world. God alone was sovereign, because He alone was holy. But holiness, let it be remembered, with Isaiah was never a static quality, but an intensely active and dynamic force; an atmosphere of fire burning ceaselessly around men and nations and things. Holiness being the essence of reality, he affirmed the truth that God controlled the policies of nations and set the bounds to man's ambitions, because God only was real. On this account righteousness either in a people or an individual was the sole standard of permanence on this planet. The prophet's criticisms of Judah's policies were based not only on his belief that they were foolish and ineffective; but because he saw them always in relation to the righteous purposes of God. All the sufferings and hardships that should result from the Assyrian war were in Judah's case to become disciplines; which while austere in effect,

were instinct with loving kindness. Judah was safe, because God had committed to her the religious future of the race; Jerusalem was inviolate at that time, because therein Jehovah had laid the chief cornerstone of the world's spiritual hopes.

But the holy fire which was to refine Judah was also burning about Assyria, and if Assyria were wholly false, as Isaiah believed she was, she was doomed: "wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks." From the highlands of spiritual vision the prophet calmly awaited the development of events. So long as Assyria was far from the borders of Judah, the danger seemed vague and inchoate; but now that her armies were but two days' march from the city the situation assumed a terrible and concrete simplicity. It was his tremendous faith in God as active holiness that gave the prophet the courage to meet the crisis in a truly great way.

In a passage of immense imaginative force Isaiah showed how easy it would be for Assyria to march to the walls of Jerusalem. He takes his stand on his watch tower and beholds in vision, the advance of the invading foe, and forecasts the probable route of the march. Palestine was a land of peculiar topography; of deep defiles and hills, broken at the

center by a great range of mountains. Jerusalem was situated on the top of the central range, and could be approached only through a series of ascending pathways, over which it was difficult to carry heavy baggage, and almost impossible to manipulate horses and chariots. On this account an attack upon it would always be hazardous and chiefly the work of foot soldiers. But the Assyrian was master of a new sort of warfare, and had learned from experience in this country, how to overcome difficulties, which in the border wars of past times, had been Jerusalem's chief protection. Thus the holy city had lost most of its natural defenses and lay at the mercy of the invading foe. The route lay through deep defiles, flanked here and there by little towns; while above them on the heights were watch towers from which sentinels looked out over the rolling country and gave warning of the enemy's approach.

In a dramatic imaginary account the prophet depicts the probable route of march, and the effect it would have on the exposed countryside. You see the Assyrian, flushed with victory, driving his army up through the deep gorges, now and then becoming visible as he reaches some well known pass. Cowering like birds before the fowler are the little villages, the people panic stricken and fleeing with their belongings to places of safety. He lays up in one place his heavy baggage and moves with



greater swiftness until he is seen by the watchers on the heights, whose fearful cries now fill the land. At last he is at Nob, three miles distant from the holy city, and defiantly waves his hand at Zion, virgin daughter of God. Do not miss the force of this, for here Isaiah sees no defending army, no Egyptian hosts to keep the promises made and covenanted; no respect for treaties on the part of the invader. Humanly speaking, there was nothing in the visible aspect of the case to prevent Assyria from doing this very thing. As a matter of fact this particular army did not invade Judah; neither did Sennacherib's hosts follow this route; but so far as Judah is concerned there was no reason why Assyria should not have invested her capital city also; for it was not Judah's military strength, nor her Egyptian alliance, but political disturbances at home that prevented Sargon from finishing the conquest of the land after the fall of Samaria.

But the point of greater consequence is that events fully justified the prophet, for when Jerusalem finally faced a siege, things turned out precisely as he had predicted. The soldiers, especially the Arabian mercenaries, threw down their weapons and fled the field; the diplomats and foreign ambassadors flung aside their official robes lest they be taken and slain, while the city streets were filled with frenzied crowds that could think of nothing better to do than to give themselves up to de-

bauchery and despair. The remarkable feature of these terrible times was the courage and calmness of the man of God; he is a striking example of his own saying: "He that believeth shall not make haste."

This was the impending event — a possible siege of Jerusalem — that developed the prophet's intuition of God's active holiness into a tremendous principle for the interpretation of history. Holiness became the touchstone of reality, and with it he tested out the purposes of men and nations before the judgment seat of God.

We shall understand this more clearly if we consider Assyria's view of the case. A nation's ambitions are greatly influenced by its experience in war. If reverses prevail over successes a nation will become less egoistic and self-reliant; under the severe discipline of adversity it frequently modifies its ambitions; but if it meet with a series of unbroken successes, if nothing check its headlong course it will become selfish, arrogant and reliant until it becomes a swollen, inflated thing. Now this was what happened to Assyria. She began her westward thrust for the purpose of subjugating Egypt; but at the outset this was a vague, inchoate dream, without form or content. After twenty years, however, of successful campaigning Assyria had a great record to her credit, and her self-confidence grew apace. "It is now in her heart," says the

prophet, "to destroy and cut off nations not a few." The purpose of the ruthless invader has changed from a simple conquest of nations into a determination to destroy whole peoples. Already Mesopotamia was filling up with captives and spoil of war. Her pride was tremendous, for she said in her heart: "Are not my princes, all of them kings? Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and Samaria; shall I not as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, do so to Jerusalem and her idols?" Well, why not? She could reckon her successes in terms of treasure, captives, and territory — in the prestige of a terrible name — and it was an added element in her satisfaction to believe that in subduing peoples, she also conquered their gods. All this is fully in accord with the boastful inscriptions found on Assyrian monuments of the period. Sennacherib speaks of shutting up Hezekiah in Jerusalem as a bird in a cage; he boasts of overpowering him by the might of his magnificence; and this is a demonstration of the truth that the nation is basing its hopes of permanence and importance, upon brute force and material efficiency, and nothing else.

So far as I know, no nation since those times has so strikingly followed the Assyrian model, or believed in the Assyrian creed of material efficiency

as autocratic Germany. Aware as we are of the collapse of both nations before the power of spiritual reality, it were easy to confess the futility of such a creed; but to the nations standing immediately in front of this tremendous force, listening to these boastings and beholding the awful effects of these arrogant policies on weaker peoples the situation would have another aspect. There is a terrible plausibility about visible successes, for outwardly Assyria had done all that she claimed to have done. She could not be beaten in the field, and the whole world knew it. She had gained results; her gains were actual and visible, but were they real? Could she hold on to them, when she came in touch with moral reality? It was difficult for the oppressed and spiritually destitute nations that lay directly in her path to think otherwise. As her policies rapidly took form it was difficult indeed for the people of Judah to resist raising the question: Was Jehovah the true sovereign of the world? Was He real? and did He control events? If so what was the reason for delay in punishing the wicked and vindicating the righteous? Thus men felt during the great war when they saw Germany standing with ensanguined feet upon the fairest lands of Europe. They asked a question that must be answered: Is righteousness in control of the world; can a spiritual view of life's values be maintained in face of material successes?

Such questions are fully answered, neither by the conflict of visible forces, nor by the arrangements of statesmen and diplomats. What is required for the adequate understanding of such problems is to match visible forces with invisible; to bring material actuality, measured by captives, spoil and territory into contact with moral reality through the medium of a tremendous truth — which Judah had at first despised and then forgotten — and this truth could not appear effectively among visible events until it had been born in the human heart. In other words it must first develop in human consciousness as a mighty faith before it can become the assessor of events on the field of history. Judah at present, was without religious supports; she did not understand her experience because she knew nothing of spiritual reality; but Isaiah did know — that is the significance of this great chapter.

We have become so familiar with the prophet's conception of God that we need only note how he applied it to the present situation. His fundamental doctrine of God's active holiness enables us to understand what he means by reality. Reality was what could live in the fire. If there were but a little of this in a nation the hardships it might experience would develop it into more harmonious relations with the supreme reality which conditioned all life; if on the contrary the whole nation were false, then it was doomed. Military reverses or social dis-

orders might determine the external aspect of the disaster, but its essence would be fixed by its inner unsoundness; it would perish because it could not survive the ordeal by fire. Everybody was much occupied at this time with actual events; with visibilities of one sort and another; and to the natural mind the balance was greatly in favor of Assyria; but according to the inspired vision of Isaiah reality would be what remained when the fires of God's righteous judgment passed over it.

From this fundamental doctrine Isaiah developed two principles which underly his teaching about providence. First he affirmed that God alone must control events simply because He was real; He directs the policies of nations in accord with His own will. The prophet called Assyria God's ax. Now an ax is a thing, and remains a thing to the end; its use is always determined by the intelligence that wields it. Could anything more properly classify that proud complex of atheistic arrogance and brute force making up Assyria than to describe her as God's thing? Secondly, the prophet taught that God's providence has two purposes: one of judgment, the other of moral discipline. He believed that the Assyrian war was a conflict between organized selfishness and moral principle. So soon as God had finished with Assyria, He would punish her for her wickedness; on the other hand while the prophet knew that the moral principle which was

slowly but surely bringing Assyria to the judgment seat did not reside in Judah, he believed that the spiritual responsibilities which had been placed on the chosen people were the guarantee of their survival. God had chosen Judah for the spiritual advantage of the future. On this account he could but regard the sufferings of the Assyrian campaign in the light of disciplinary mercies; and see in the terrible actualities of the time evidences of loving kindness. The hardships were real of course; they had to be if discipline was to be effective. They were, moreover, justified because Judah was ignorant of her spiritual responsibilities. She still clung to the old tribal idea of a deity that could be placated with animal sacrifices, pleased with ornate ceremonies, and cajoled and befooled at will. She must pass through the fires of God in order to know His nature and power; she must be made to realize the Divine sovereignty by a fresh apprehension of holiness and grace. What Isaiah had gained in knowledge of God from his prophetic call, and matured into a spiritually uplifting conviction through years of loneliness and isolation, Judah must experience through a refining and purging discipline.

Such convictions enabled the prophet, in the hour of her greatest triumphs, to predict the fall of Assyria; upon them he based his faith that Assyria was not only limited in the scope of her ambitions, but also doomed to certain destruction be-

cause she was in conflict with the righteousness of God.

In this notable utterance the prophet pronounced the failure of every form of material efficiency whenever it comes into conflict with moral reality. Efficiency is mere deadness in the hands of God; like the mole it works blindly without any idea of its goal; but moral reality — that which can live in the tremendous fires which burn around the earth — is vital, self-conscious and self-determining because it is inspired by communion with the living God.

Such faith as this has an important bearing on the present world situation, for one of our clearest convictions is that the great war was a trial of strength between material efficiency and moral reality; the same issues were at stake and the inevitable result has been accomplished.

Germany in most aspects of her life, especially in her military policy and political ambitions has been the legitimate successor in the modern world of ancient Assyria. Her faith in destiny was founded on organized force, thinly disguised by a series of mistaken political and religious ideals; her idealism in fact was ever the bondservant of her materialism. She stood in our day in place of Assyria, and performed the same disciplinary service for modern peoples that Assyria rendered to the nations of Palestine.

Great outbreaks like the war may be occasioned



by events, but they are caused by the explosive force of ideas which grow up within the traditions of a nation. The political philosophy of autocratic Germany was based on a very simple principle, namely that the individual exists solely for the well being of the state. From this naturally developed such ideas as that the end of the state is power; that weakness in the state is the unpardonable sin, in Treitschke's phrase "the sin against the Holy Ghost of politics." It was a system of pure egoism; the people of that country were taught to believe that implicit and unreasoning obedience of the state is the highest duty of the subject; that war is the normal expression of the state's vitality, and that small states by reason of their weakness have no right to exist.

Germany's confidence in her political philosophy was sustained by two things: obvious material efficiency and a false theory of divine providence, and both conceptions were encouraged and at the same time falsified by her military successes. As noticed above the aims of a nation will be determined in large measure by its history and traditions; and the political traditions of the Teutonic peoples seem to have predestined them to tread in the dangerous path of world dominion, until they confronted the righteous indignation of the civilized world.

The phrase, "Germany over all" expressed at the outset of the war a vague and inchoate dream;

but early military successes served to enlarge it, and give it a concrete meaning, until she stood in the same relation to modern peoples as Assyria did towards the nations in Palestine. She no longer made war on particular nations but upon whole peoples; until her aim was to destroy the autonomy and influence of Latin and Anglo-Saxon civilization. The issue between the contending forces was sharpened to the simplest terms. It was nothing less than this: Which civilization was to dominate the world? Was it to be one based upon the machine or upon the mind? Was organized and enlightened self-interest or moral reality to become the goal of the race? And this was precisely the same issue at stake on the hills of Palestine in the eighth century before Christ.

Germany supported her political ambitions by a false religious philosophy. The root principle of this, the most pernicious form of pragmatism, was that God was obliged to follow the lines of a nation's development. Germany took it for granted that a nation's destiny being determined by its successful exploitation of other peoples, fixed unalterably the ways of providence; God must always be on the side of the strongest nation, for was not the survival of the fittest one of the laws of nature? And if of nature, why not also of nations? That God was the supporter of the successful nation has been one of Germany's fixed obsessions; in fact the morality of

a nation was always determined by its successes. If a nation could conquer other nations, exploit peoples and take territory, this demonstrated the truth that God was with her. In precisely the same fashion Assyria reasoned: "Is not Calno as Carhemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" As Assyria, encouraged by her military successes felt that she could afford to ignore the moral principles of other nations, so Germany took the position that she could discard and offend against the standards of political morality which hitherto had characterized civilized peoples; and that too not only because she believed herself successful in the field, but also because she believed that her successes were signs of Divine favor. "Onward with God," was the Kaiser's cry; but there was nothing in this German god that resembled the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; but rather something like an old pagan deity with a hammer in his hand. The misguided people believed profoundly in this peculiar product of Germanic theological genius, and therein lay their doom.

The hostile attitude towards Christianity taken by such philosophers as Nietzsche was due in great

measure to the fact that Christianity is favorable to democracy; the fierce denunciation of the doctrine of survival of the unfit, whom he contemptuously called the "botched of mankind," through redeeming love, and the defiant assertion that Christianity must be destroyed in order that democracy might fail are illustrations of a machine civilization coming into deadly conflict with a civilization founded on the mind. After all the most important issue that has been decided by the war is that the society of the future shall rest not on matter but on mind, not on material efficiency but on moral reality.

The stunting effect of this egoistic system on the masses of the people is sufficient to discredit it. In military text books designed for the training of officers, careful instructions are given for "smashing the spiritual life of the common soldier." He must be trained in a different code of morals from that to which as a private subject, he has been accustomed. When he enlists he becomes a unit in a machine; he must learn to do things that are revolting to human nature, that offend the conscience and is justified in doing them because the state, a part of which organization he is, can do no wrong. This is efficiency at its maximum power — *a system that turns man into a thing*, because it is designed to take out of the individual all autonomous thought and feeling such as sympathy for the distressed, pity for the weak, and kindness toward the

dependent. It makes might the sole test of morals, and weakness the only sin; it turns a man into a thing of brawn and callousness and sends him out on a mission of frightfulness. This killing of babies, violation of helpless women, bombing of hospitals, destruction of churches, and ruthless disregard of the sacred rights of mankind, what has this been but a riotous outbreak of depersonalized things, manipulated by the powers of darkness in high places?

The policy of turning men into things has had a twofold effect on the German character. In the first place it destroyed the personal autonomy of the individual, and this, in my judgment, is the greatest of crimes.

“Think, I adjure you, what it is to slay  
The reverence living in the minds of men.”

For if it be a more culpable thing to destroy the sanity of the mind than to injure the body, what can be said of a political system that destroys the moral autonomy of the soul! It is a terrible thing we have seen, my masters, this destruction of the human personality; and the hour of Germany's doom struck when those things she had made of her subjects were by an imperious necessity made to think; and the product of such thinking we now see, when a whole people, not with unrestrained passion, but with keen intelligence sustained by the memory of an

age-long wrong, have turned upon the iniquitous system and consigned it to deserved oblivion. It means that no government can exist, or will be permitted to exist, in the future that interferes with the normal development of the human personality.

The second consequence of the system was to make cowards of men. This is shown by the fact that Germany believed she could break the *morale* of the Allies by a policy of frightfulness; and faith in this method was sustained by the feeling that such a policy would be quite successful with her people; and was not fear of invasion a potent reason why she was so eager to bring the struggle to a close, even when she knew that she could expect nothing but drastic terms from her justly indignant opponents?

Efficiency was doomed, not only because it was in conflict with moral reality, but also because it violated the sacred rights of human personality. The civilization that shall issue from the war will be based upon the mind; it will give the fullest possible opportunities to the individual; and if it can adjust itself to the spiritual implications of the great struggle, it will through its very hardships and losses have attained to finer quality; and be better fitted to live in the tremendous fires of holiness which are burning round this planet, and which in the end must determine for all nations and peoples the nature of reality.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE REPOSE OF A SETTLED FAITH

Isaiah xxviii:16; xxx:15: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. . . . In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

In the last chapter we saw how Isaiah met the crisis which arose in Judah through the fall of Samaria. Humanly speaking, there was no reason why Sargon should not have taken Jerusalem also; but domestic troubles called him home, and the siege was postponed for twenty years.

Before taking up the interesting series of prophecies concerned with the deliverance of Jerusalem, we must pay some attention to Isaiah's method of dealing with the godly people in Judah. So far we have been taken up with the destructive phase of the story: the successful advance of Assyria through Palestine; the ineffective policies of the rulers to check it; and the disordered social life of the people. We have touched but lightly upon the constructive aspect of the story. Now the destructive forces of life are usually the noisy forces, which

seems to justify Carlyle's remark that history "is not the record of the doings, but of the misdoings of men." Human nature is more interested in destruction than in construction, for it is easier to pull down than to build up; and while our study so far has satisfied this Adamic instinct, still a too prolonged reflection on the destructive phases of the time is apt to leave one discouraged. It raises the question: Were all the people of Judah in this evil case? Were there no devout and holy folk there, who while suffering with the guilty, had no word of consolation or of encouragement from the great prophet? We turn to this more attractive side of the story in this chapter.

Isaiah had a band of disciples, to which in appealing asides and little artless remarks as he goes along, he gave most helpful messages. Good people can always be found in Zion, since God never leaves Himself without witness; and it was on account of the godly element in Judah that we have some of the most beautiful and important teachings of the prophet.

Let us for a moment recall the three convictions of Isaiah, which determined the character of his message and the consistency of his predictions throughout that terrible time. First he fully understood the nature of the Assyrian advance. Long before the politicians realized what was coming he saw in vision the desolation of the land. He held no illu-



sions concerning the power or intentions of that ruthless foe; she was well nigh irresistible, and her campaigns would work havoc in the whole region of Palestine. Secondly, he as fully comprehended the incapacity of the nations called upon to dispute the sovereignty of the land with the invader. They were "stumps of smoking fire-brands" without diplomatic or military leadership, devoid of faith in God and entirely at the mercy of impressionists who wanted to follow the easiest way. None of their policies were adequate, for "the bed was shorter than that a man could stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he could wrap himself in it." The most dangerous policy of all — that of alliance with Egypt, the blustering braggart whose strength was to sit still — was growing in popularity and destined to lead Judah into a trap, from which the mercy of God alone could deliver her. Isaiah knew perfectly well what would happen as soon as Assyria invested the capital. The nation would break under the strain, the people lose heart, and the situation would become intolerable. There were others in Zion that saw this, and they were among the best people of the land; and as Isaiah's ministry grew in importance he devoted increasing attention to this class; and opposed to the hopeless aspect of the case a third great conviction, that Jerusalem was inviolate at that time. There was a reason why God

was not ready to abandon her to her enemies. The times were serious; the nation was to be sifted as wheat; but all through destruction Isaiah saw construction at work. The great fire of holiness was already consuming unreality; but the fire that was to destroy Assyria would eventually reveal in Zion an indestructible element. The godly would come out of it refined like gold. The great prophet does not take a small view of spiritual results. He calls the godly element in Zion a remnant, but it is a word of quality, it stands for God's finest product; and in all his passionate denunciations of the prevailing follies of the time he never permits himself to forget the needs of this holy and believing people. At this stage he could not deliver all of his message. Not until the actual trial and deliverance, twenty years later, could he open his mind without reserve; but as the Assyrian with relentless precision advanced through the land; as one after another of the popular measures failed to avert the crisis, the prophet found occasion to speak home to the heart of the believing remnant. His message is essentially taken up with the present inviolability of Jerusalem, and the advent, be it soon or late of a great spiritual leader. His Messianic prophecies were developed in connection with the peculiar needs of the spiritual element. We shall have occasion to consider them in a subsequent chapter; here we are concerned with the first of the great conceptions,

Isaiah had a reason for believing that God would not permit Assyria to destroy Jerusalem at this time. It was the dwelling place of the Holy One; it was the home of the spiritually alert; the time had not yet come to lead them forth on that greater adventure known as the Babylonian captivity; still the devout people were well aware of the possibility of dispersion. Was not Samaria even then desolate? Were not the people of Northern Israel scattered abroad in Mesopotamia? Should this happen to them what would become of their spiritual hopes?

Isaiah met this legitimate demand in a truly great way. In advance of events, and in face of a hopeless outlook he proclaimed the inviolability of the holy city with a confidence born of a faith whose spiritual passion was sustained at all points by profound and reasonable conviction. God had laid in Zion, a chief cornerstone, elect, tried, and precious. In spite of her unworthiness Judah was the chosen of the Almighty, elect unto a certain mission, and the spiritual hopes of the world depended upon her continuance as an independent nation. Assyria, ambitious for world dominion; Phœnicia whose sordid imagination embraced the commercial opportunities of the sea; and Egypt, dreaming on her hot Nile sands had been passed over; and Divine providence had selected this insignificant remnant of a slave people to deliver the world from spiritual bondage.

It was Germany's habit, during the war, to justify her ruthless disregard of the rights of weaker peoples on the ground that the world had gained little or nothing from the influence of small nations. This however is contrary to fact. That rare culture which like a volatile essence has spread its sweetness over the earth; that conception of ordered liberty which is the foundation of modern democracies; and the religion that has created and sustained the altruistic purposes of enlightened civilization in the greatest of moral struggles — all came from small nations; while those huge masses of conceit, arrogance and egoism known as mighty empires, are now but piles of archeological débris, the study of whose dusty records affords employment for sleepy old gentlemen, who dream away their lives in the cloistered seclusion of the university campus.

The inviolability of Jerusalem was based upon the religious destiny of Judah. The other side of this great affirmation was the Divine intention of checking and controlling Assyrian ambition. Somewhere, and somehow, he does not specify, God would stop the advancing hosts. "He will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria and the glory of his high looks." On this ground Isaiah made his great appeal to the godly remnant. Let them trust in the fact; let them not be dismayed because their leaders had no policy; the situation was not

in their hands, but in God's, and sooner or later He would vindicate them.

It was an unstable time. The feverish preparations, foolish arrangements and abortive remedies devised by the rulers would avail nothing. Judah was like a silly dove, fussed and excited; in a word, full of haste and waste; but said the prophet: he that believeth shall not make haste; he shall never be in a hurry. Over and over again he rings the changes on the great words: in returning from all these foolish measures and in rest upon the promises of the eternal God shall ye be safe; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength. The godly are urged not to be dismayed by the popular clamor. "Fear not their fear," said he, "nor trust in their preparations, but put your confidence in the Holy One and He shall deliver you."

The essence of his message was: the repose of a settled faith. He urges his generation to examine its life, acquaint itself with its spiritual responsibilities, to think through the times to a real and abiding peace: in Zion is laid a chief cornerstone, elect, tried, and precious: he that believeth shall not make haste.

History has abundantly fulfilled this prediction. From the middle of the eighth century B. C. Jerusalem was in the hands of one after another of great empires:—Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome; and although the Jewish people passed

through many vicissitudes, they were able to sustain their spiritual supremacy until they had finished their mission, and given Christ to the world. Throughout that long period of discipline the holy Jews could have joined in the song of Ben Ezra:

“God spoke, and gave us the word to keep,  
Bade never fold the hands nor sleep  
'Mid a faithless world — at watch and ward,  
Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.”

When Christ fulfilled the Jewish mission, the nation was no longer important; but during the long period of preparation for the Lord's coming the people never lost their spiritual supremacy.

Isaiah was very frank with his generation. He tells the godly people that they must get ready for more serious trials, for the time is set for a consummation, but the end of it all shall be a stable peace. The overflowing Assyrian scourge shall make way for overflowing righteousness; but this deeper experience is possible only through a real knowledge of the character and purposes of God.

We recall Isaiah's ruling conception of holiness as an active force. The unreality of his times appalled him. Assyria was hopelessly involved because she did not understand the meaning of her successes. Setting out as she thought to overcome the world, it turned out that God was using her as a means for chastising Judah. She was simply the unintelligent agent in a scheme of vast import.

Judah was unreal too; anybody could see that: but underneath the accumulated rubbish there was something fine, and beautiful and ideal; a capacity for spiritual experience and heroic devotion unsuspected in the Laodicean days of the long peace.

The hopeful element was the godly remnant; but its trouble just now was mental distress due to the anxieties of the time; for no matter how much faith one has, it is exceedingly difficult to live in harmony with it, when you have no confidence in your rulers, when you know the instability of the social organization, and especially when your country is threatened with invasion by a cruel and ruthless foe. What is wanted is not simply faith, but ideas which sustain faith with reasonable convictions, and afford one the opportunity of understanding the significance of events.

Isaiah laid down the proposition that a long discipline was needed to fit the nation for its religious mission, and urged the righteous to have faith in God; but he sought to put behind their faith the clarity and courage of rich and deep convictions; not only that they might understand God, but also be able to discern the signs of the times. His aim was not simply to proclaim a faith, but to propagate it through the medium of great ideas about God. He built up his theology around three conceptions, which the times were capable of illustrating: God is wise, God is austere, and God is kind; conceptions

which will be seen to underly a valid knowledge of God to-day.

God is wise, but what do we mean by wisdom? It is not, as many suppose, the mere possession of knowledge, but ability to use knowledge for some practical purpose. Wisdom is active knowledge, working towards constructive ends; and on that account is often present in the most commonplace affairs of life; its voice is heard on the street corners and men ignore it because it is so familiar. Isaiah's world was filled with conversation about organization, efficiency, and diplomatic arrangements. Such novelties as treaties based on tribute, Egyptian alliances and the like were called wisdom by the rulers; while the prophet's pointed advice was scornfully rejected because it was familiar and commonplace. His hearers overlooked the fact that because wisdom consistently works towards certain very practical ends, it must of necessity soon lose all character of novelty; it is not on that account however unimportant; in fact the commonness of a truth may be the measure of its value to mankind. That is why Isaiah insisted that God also was wise; He too had His plans about things; as a wise man sees his objective and proceeds by the most direct route to it, so were events rapidly moving towards a Divine consummation.

It is very easy to believe the abstract doctrine that



God is wise; but in practice it is very difficult to believe in it. Science has compelled us to accept its canon of order for the natural world; but we are still disinclined to its vigorous application to the affairs of the soul; not through lack of evidence, but simply because the natural man is indisposed to live in such a world. We prefer to believe in a Deity who works by fits and starts — a haphazard God, who touches life in episodic ways, by signs and wonders of one sort or another. We confess our preference for this haphazard Deity whenever we act on the supposition that God can be influenced by ceremonies and ritual performances. The people of Jerusalem were great church goers; they offered praise and sacrifice, according to the most approved conventions, but their interest in God was occasional and external. They were quite willing to offer bribes in order that He might overlook their misdoings. But such a conception will always break down when it meets a first class test; and when the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold the faith of Judah gave way; the rulers could see nothing but dire disaster, haphazard mischief running loose, and could meet it only with what they called wisdom: some suggestion of tribute or alliance with Egypt. It was their preference for such haphazard conceptions that led to the rejection of Isaiah's advice; it was highly offensive because it was a sane plea

to seek salvation in the orderly processes of life, rather than in some novel scheme devised by drunken diplomats or time-serving priests.

In face of this, the prophet pressed home to the heart of his generation the truth that God was wise, ruling the world according to a plan both constant and consistent; and which could be understood by any who would take the trouble to consider the common experiences of life.

The tribal notion of a Deity wedded to a land of a certain people had degenerated into a belief that God could be compelled to walk in a path of man's devising. The false prophets had affirmed that God must care for Judah no matter what its moral condition might be. The Assyrian also held this pernicious doctrine and imagined that in overcoming nations, he was also conquering their gods. And it is just possible that some of the devout people were influenced by this view. It lay in the mind as a formless doubt, it tormented the heart as an inchoate fear, for the course of events — the plausible secularities of the time — such as Assyrian success and Judah's prostration gave force to the notion. But to this Isaiah opposed his great idea of order. God's control of this movement would be demonstrated in the course of time; Judah needed a wholesome discipline, but she would emerge from it a finer and holier people. God had summoned Assyria, the "rod of His anger" to do a certain

work; when that work was consummated He would break the rod and burn it in the fires of His holiness. The terrible flood of visibilities then rolling over the land was of Jehovah's devising; in His own good time, He would check it.

He urged the devout people to associate this visitation with their spiritual hopes. Fear not their fear, nor be moved by their anxieties; but break with the impressionism of the time and base your faith in the future on the stately orderliness of providence; for the Divine will is discoverable in experience, and eventually will become manifest on the field of history when His righteous purposes are accomplished.

God is austere. The hardships of the Assyrian campaign could not be ignored. The innocent were suffering with the guilty, and righteousness did not give one immunity from physical discomfort or loss of goods. Personal liberty and life itself were endangered: what could be said of this? If God controlled the world and was mercifully inclined towards His people, why do the righteous suffer?

This problem was not as acute then as it became later, when through the long discipline of the Babylonian captivity the Jew gained an enlarged sense of personal significance; still it was serious enough, and Isaiah met it with the teaching that God's methods must sometimes be painful. Suffering offered no problem for the guilty, but for the devout Jew it was a very serious matter; and Isaiah's teaching an-

ticipates that of Jesus: "Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." This strange work of God is seen in all ages. Under trial the good become better; sometimes a whole nation like our own will through the hardships of war cast off its materialism and become fully conscious of its idealistic spirit; the processes are always painful, but the consequences are beyond question beneficial.

The purpose of this painful experience according to the prophet was a closer intimacy with God. He taught the truth in principle that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of anything. This truth of atonement — the basic principle of Christianity — cannot be learned out of a book, but must be evolved from actual experience. If there had been no unmerited sufferings in the prophet's age, there had been no fifty third chapter of Isaiah.

Pain is the great quickener of the soul; from it as from no other teacher do we learn the sacramental character of life. We are beginning to think vitally again about the atonement of Christ, because the war brought the opportunity to large masses of people of becoming aware of the awakening character of sacrifice. Our sons have shown us Christ; as they shed their blood to put away the German evil, so has Christ through His atonement put away our sins and made us fit to become the sons of God. One of the great gains of the war has been the calling

forth of a spirit of sacrifice which has enabled us the better to comprehend the death of Jesus Christ.

This is the meaning of the Divine austerity; the permanent gains of life come to us through suffering. We forget our pleasures quickly but our pains we remember forever; and it was because Isaiah saw Jehovah's orderly purposes manifesting themselves through pain, that he was enabled to say a third thing about God.

God is kind. The object of painful experience is to bring man into closer intimacy with the parent source of life. Like a mother bird, hovering over Jerusalem — that is Isaiah's conception of loving kindness. Suffering was not punishment, neither was it limited to discipline; its final purpose was communion with the eternal in the deepest experiences of the Divine life; for suffering for others is the very life of God; and perfect communion with Him is possible only through a like experience.

This is a profound truth, slowly developed by the prophets, and fully expressed in the atoning mercy of our Lord: but I wonder if we have yet realized it? Discipline, even for the best and most obedient, is a sorry business, unless it yield some kind of fruit. If discipline is to be acceptable, we must pass through it to some sort of fellowship, since what is wanted by the heavy laden spirit is encouragement. Not suffering of itself, but suffering without explanation, in loneliness and isolation,

which seems to yield no fruit — that is the real problem of life. It was then, it is now. Discipline is and remains under all explanations, a hard word; for it stands at best for resignation towards a universe you do not understand. What man requires is to believe that the universe is friendly, that its most austere processes are instinct with kindness; and that is what we get here. Grant that suffering has meaning, that it has been and always will be the royal road to Divine intimacy, and we may accept it and bear it with a sort of enthusiasm; and this is Isaiah's argument: and most beautifully does he illustrate it at the end of the twenty eighth chapter.

The farmer does not always plow; when the ground is ready he plants the seed, and when the harvest comes, he deals with each growth according to its nature. He does not thresh the fitches with a threshing instrument lest he bruise them; neither does he turn a cart wheel over the cummin lest he crush it; but he beats out the one with a staff and the other with a rod. So is it with God. His wisdom is austere, but its issue is loving kindness: "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." Thus Isaiah appealed to the righteous in his day. He urged them to believe in God in face of an austere situation because He was both wise and merciful; and his message is valid for our time.

The common defect of life before the great war was a partial view of God. Science had given us

a positive conception of order in the natural world; its method was adopted for the study of religious and social problems; but we have been unwilling to vigorously apply the concept to the individual life, or accept it as a sanction for private conduct.

We have thought of God too much from the point of view of theory. He was a dogma written in a book, to be disputed about, analyzed and developed into a philosophy barren of practical value. To many He was little more than a departmental Deity, presiding over some restricted domain of life. He was interested only in what men wanted done: to one He was a zealot for temperance, to another for political reform or social service. Some nations like that of Germany, regarded Him as a tribal Deity, concerned with the development of a particular people; while many simply took Him for granted and thought no more about it. To the man in the street, the traditional notion of religion often seemed little more than a belief in a haphazard Deity, revealing Himself in the form of interference with human progress, or touching life only in episodic ways. But of God's holiness — that tremendous fire which burns round this planet, and determines the meaning of reality for men and nations, we have thought but little. Life was settling on its lees; the mind was becoming stale and dull, in religious matters incapable of moving out of fixed channels; we measured ourselves by ourselves, and compared ourselves with

ourselves and were quite unwilling to take an impartial view.

Then came the war and we gradually awoke to reality; we became aware of the monstrous power of evil let loose in the world — the Satanic possibilities of human nature even when developed under the highest type of civilization; we discovered the fundamental difference between right and wrong; if right was to prevail we must fight for it, and if need be, die for it; and this forced us to abandon a superficial view of ourselves; we learned the deep truth that only by shedding blood can evil be put away; and as the nation responded to the sacrificial imperatives of its mission, it grew in mental and moral stature. We discovered above all the need of deep and sustained beliefs; we felt that we must have a better conception of God and His relation to what was going on here. We knew from the start, that He could not be indifferent, but it was left for us to discover, so soon as the progress of the war had reduced the issues to one — a conflict between good and evil — not that God must take our side, but that we must take His side.

Who can now doubt but that the issue of the war was determined by moral principle struggling with and finally overcoming organized evil; or fail to accept the clear implication that the strength and vitality of moral principle, even under the severest tests was due to the influence of Christianity on the Allied



nations? A lie cannot live, neither can a truth die; and if the Allies have triumphed over a system founded on falsehood it has been due to the fact that they could in some fashion survive in the tremendous fires of reality which have been burning round this planet; some deposit in these nations of value to mankind, which it was God's purpose to refine and preserve. Isaiah maintained that Judah was inviolate simply because she had a spiritual commission for mankind. The supreme revelation of the war has been the discovery that God had laid among the Allied nations a chief cornerstone, elect, tried, and precious. So far as we can see, the spiritual future of the race depends on the persistence of that sort of civilization German autocracy tried to destroy. If Germany failed, it was because she was unreal; she could not live in the fire; the Allied cause survived, and came out of the war a refined and beautiful thing, because it was in some measure in harmony with God's purposes for the future.

In working out this great task, there has been hardship, suffering and death; it was necessary that through our pains and sacrifices we should realize the spiritual meaning of the struggle. The war was not an accident; it was part of a plan of vast significance for mankind; and our faith in the future will be intelligent and consistent if we accept the three truths about God, that He is wise, austere,

and kind. We must not shrink from the element of austerity, for its acceptance is necessary to the *morale* of reconstruction. We must cheerfully put up with our losses, and learn from our sacrifices how to direct our hearts into deeper spiritual intimacies.

From wisdom, which is the world's order, through austerity, which is the essence of discipline, we shall advance to loving kindness, which is the world's peace; fear shall lose its power and life shall gain its inspiration from communion with the eternal God.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STATELY MARCH OF PROVIDENCE

Isaiah xxxvii:6-7: "And Isaiah said unto the servants of king Hezekiah, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the Lord: Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, where-with the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return unto his own land."

THIS is the culmination of Isaiah's great career. For forty years he had consistently maintained the inviolability of Jerusalem; and his confidence increased as the deadly menace of Assyria developed into series of successful campaigns against Palestinian states. Humanly speaking, as early as B. C. 721, when the fall of Samaria brought home to Jerusalem the fear of captivity, there was nothing to prevent the taking of the holy city. Yet the prophet did not hesitate to predict the failure of that ambitious scheme. His faith, as we have seen, was not based on human measures, for he had as little confidence in the military ability of his people as he had in the promises of Egypt; neither did he underestimate the power of the enemy. His faith was grounded upon the conviction that God would not permit the captivity of the chosen people at that

time because He had committed unto them the spiritual future of the world. In Zion had been laid a chief cornerstone; whosoever believed in this spiritual fact should neither falter nor fail.

When Sargon took Samaria in B. C. 722, instead of advancing as he desired to the walls of Jerusalem, he was obliged to return home to put down a revolt in Babylon, and the siege of the city was postponed for twenty years. During that period Sargon's successor, Sennacherib, was occupied with domestic affairs, but in B. C. 701, the westward offensive was resumed.

During this interval Judah had rest from war, and the pernicious Egyptian policy which Isaiah had condemned was allowed to ripen and bring forth evil fruit. Egypt knew perfectly well what Assyria was about; she could not hope to meet her successfully in the field, and her only chance was to wear down her spirit by keeping her continually involved with the little Palestinian states. While the distance from Assyria to Egypt was only 490 miles it had taken Assyria 45 years to reach the heart of Palestine and she was still far from her real objective. It was highly expedient therefore to encourage revolutions in the Palestinian kingdoms, chiefly by promises of aid which was never given.

During this period Ekron, a city of Philistia, encouraged by Egypt revolted, withheld its tribute, and dethroned the Assyrian vassal king Padi and

sent him in chains to Hezekiah for safe keeping. This was a cunning Egyptian trick to involve Judah with her powerful enemy and the result was a foregone conclusion; for in B. C. 701 Sennacherib at the head of a huge army appeared in Palestine, recaptured Ekron, met a small Egyptian force at Eltekeh, defeated it and then turned back to punish Judah for her share in the mischief. He took forty six walled towns, shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage; and the nation was completely prostrated by the turn of events.

The besieging force, a detachment of the main army, was accompanied by a certain civilian chancellor known as the Rabshakeh, a sort of devil's orator. His negotiations with the ambassadors of Jerusalem bring into strong relief the characteristic views of the situation.

The Rabshakeh was a resourceful man, and well he might be with an army at his back. His speeches betray considerable acquaintance with the lower aspects of human nature, a fair knowledge, too, of the world. In fact he acts and talks like a German and his demeanor reminds one of Von Bethmann-Hollweg at the head of the Prussian legions. He is contemptuous of small nations and despises provincial peoples; he had shrewd insight into character of a certain sort which enabled him to pass for a wise man; but of knowledge of the spirit of the people with whom he is dealing he shows not a trace.

He stands there — this hammer of a man — with an army at his back, in full view of the people; about their mud walls they could hear the stammering tongues of a strange and mighty race. The overflowing scourge had at last reached their gates. Was not this what Isaiah had predicted at a memorable dinner party some twenty five years before: — precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little — this monotonous pounding of battering rams on their defenses, yea too, on their weak and fearful hearts?

The Rabshakeh keenly sensed the situation and took the opportunity to heighten the effect of his discourse by speaking in the Jews' language, over the heads of the ambassadors, directly to the panic stricken folk on the walls — a vile example of open diplomacy — and this is what he said: —

“Your Egyptian policy has disappointed you, for you now know what we did to her at Eltekeh; and do you expect aid from your god? Well, how do you think he likes having his sanctuaries removed from the high places and all his influence concentrated in this insignificant town; can you expect his protection when you treat him in this fashion? Besides have I not come up against you in spite of him? And if he did not stop me at first, do you suppose he can stop me now?” At this point the cowardly ambassadors besought him not to speak any more in the Jews' language, but rather in the Syrian

tongue for fear of spreading panic in the city. But he replied, with characteristic Teutonic effrontery, in a louder voice than ever: "You are a contemptible people anyway, but after all what is the use of making all this trouble for us? Why not remain quietly here, every one eating his own food and dwelling under his own vine and fig tree until we clean up this Egyptian muddle, and then we will take you back to our glorious country where you will enjoy the civilizing influence of our 'kultur.' What a wonderful thing it will be to become good Assyrians like ourselves. Do not believe what your king tells you about your God aiding you, for you ought to know what we have done to other gods, and what happened in Samaria will as certainly happen to you if you do not submit to our wishes."

All this would have a remote interest if it did not accurately illustrate the temper of Germany in dealing with the small nations that have stood like stone walls in her path to world dominion. This man talks and reasons like a German diplomat; and betrays the same ignorance of the power of a racial spirit to triumph over material sufferings, which has characterized German policy in recent years. The Assyrian did not believe that the people of Judah would expose themselves to anything so expensive and painful as a siege; and was not this Germany's notion about Belgium? Why should they risk

physical ruin for something so intangible and unmarketable as national honor? Great Britain would not fight for a mere "scrap of paper"; neither would America come into the war because it was against her material interests. This is the low level to which a nation will descend when it stakes everything on brute force and material efficiency; and overlooks what Bismarck called the "value of the imponderables." The imponderable thing here was Judah's spiritual destiny — her religious and racial spirit; it was upon this intangible rock that Assyrian hopes were wrecked, as it was upon the invisible but potent moral idealism of the Allied peoples that Germany dashed herself to pieces.

But Judah's great spirit did not animate the hearts of those craven diplomats, "squeaking, gibbering shadows of men" who so fearfully conducted the negotiations. They frankly confessed that they had no policy. Perhaps they remembered what Isaiah had been saying of all their wise schemes, or recalled their frenzied optimism when a short while ago poor old Padi had been brought in chains to Jerusalem to make a Jewish holiday; and how the town went wild with delight and expected the speedy advent of a political millennium. Even the king was not altogether certain of the issue. He was a man of faith, and had refused to yield to Assyria's threats. He went into the Temple to



pray, and very wisely appealed to Isaiah to clear the atmosphere and suggest a suitable policy.

Prophets do not predict events, but eventualities. Isaiah did not tell the king when or in precisely what manner the Assyrian would come to grief; he plainly said that in God's good time he would be turned back. And while the Rabshakeh was bawling Teutonic blasphemies under the walls of Jerusalem, while the king lay prostrate in the house of prayer, God stopped the main army of Assyria at Pelusium on the borders of Egypt; and one morning the watchers on the walls were amazed to note the departure of the besieging force.

We need not trouble ourselves with the secondary causes that brought about this astonishing *volte-face*. The truth is that the fire of reality had reached the vitals of the Assyrian. He came to an invisible line on which was written: "They shall not pass" and he had to turn back. It is significant of much that Sennacherib said nothing about it; he did not even venture to call it a "retreat to victory." The fact of immense consequence is that when success was almost within his grasp, he abandoned the campaign, returned to Mesopotamia, and came no more to trouble the land.

At first the inhabitants of the city could not believe in their good fortune; it was too good to be true; but when the people found voice they expressed

their feelings according to their bent. The spiritually minded gave vent to their joy in the forty sixth Psalm: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Jerusalem, after years of stress and strain had become a quiet habitation.

But first impressions are of little value; our interest is in the vindication of the prophet and the final effect of the great deliverance on the nation. We shall then be in a position to estimate its value for our time.

The deliverance of Jerusalem was plainly an act of God, and this event was the logical culmination of the spiritual interpretation of history which had characterized Isaiah's long ministry. He believed that God was an active righteousness, that men and nations and things dwelt in an atmosphere of holy fire; and that ability to live therein was the sole test of reality. God had brought the Assyrian into Palestine for certain disciplinary purposes. The great event had transpired according to program, not because the prophet was gifted with a magical revelation of the future, but as the direct result of spiritual insight. To understand God's nature is to be in a position to say how His providence will affect history. If God were a consuming fire and Assyria unfit to live in it, then Assyria was doomed; and the historic vindication of the prophet's ministry was a clear demonstration of his unique

conception of the righteousness and universal providence of the Lord of Hosts.

This principle is still valid. God has not changed, neither has human nature. We are made of the same red clay; the same forces are working in the modern world as made up the history of the eighth century before Christ; and until God changes or man's constitution is fundamentally altered history, destiny, national and individual life will be subject to the same laws. That is why autocratic Germany failed. No nation has ever been able to live in the holy fires on other terms than moral reality. It may last a long time and do immense harm to the spiritual interests of humanity, but its doom is certain.

Let us not be impatient with God, nor count His long suffering as slackness. One day with Him is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. He cannot be hurried, neither do His plans develop prematurely; and the reason is that all racial experiences are designed to make Him known. Knowledge of both God and man can come only through a prolonged conflict between good and evil, such as was illustrated by the struggle of Assyria with Judah. The Hebrews gained greatly in knowledge of God through their Assyrian discipline; so have we in our conflict with Germany; but whether such knowledge is to result in a permanent or temporary gain will depend on our *receptivity*; and

that is the standard by which to measure the value of this deliverance to the generation to which Isaiah belonged.

On the ruling classes the chief impression of the experience was that religion after all had a place in social and political life. It led to certain reforms, for even the most thoughtless were disposed to admit that it had been a good thing for the nation to have religious people in it.

This often happens; social disturbances turn men's thoughts towards God; political changes set them on fresh quests for peace, while even skeptical statesmen are disposed to confess in such crises that religion is needed to furnish sanctions for government. But the danger, ever present in abnormal times, is that interest in religion will be limited to what is expedient. When the Assyrian was far from their gates, the rulers had ridiculed the prophet's advice, on the ground that religion as he understood it had no value for the diplomat or statesman, because it offered no solution for their problems; was in fact mere childishness: precept upon precept, and line upon line; but now that events had vindicated the prophet they were disposed to agree with him. It was a mighty good thing after all that God was on their side. Such a position often leads to false security and self-deception; for many will speak well of religion, urge it on their neighbors, and even use it super-

ficially as a social or political panacea without the slightest intention of becoming religious themselves.

The superficial interest in religious reform developed a line of cleavage among the people; it afforded a fitting background for the sterling worth of the godly remnant. They were profoundly and gloriously impressed with the turn of events. They saw in religion no temporary expedient for safeguarding a nation's material well being, but an abiding relationship to a holy and gracious God. They had passed through the purging fires along with their neighbors, but had come forth refined and purified. They had discovered God afresh; as it had been in former times so had they seen the Divine power in the holy city. It set them to thinking of the loving kindness of the Lord in the midst of the temple. In the days of their trouble they had earnestly prayed for deliverance, and now they realized that it was by terrible and glorious things that God had answered them. They had learned the painful but salutary truth that God was not conducting the world in the interests of their happiness but for the satisfaction of their spiritual natures, and that such satisfaction could not be obtained apart from pain and sacrifice. They had lost most of their worldly goods, and all their comfortableness, but had grown in mental and moral stature. They had left the nest, but were beginning to love the arena, and were greatly alive to the spirit-

ual implications of their race. They no longer attached primary importance to outward events, but found their peace and joy in the deep river of God flowing through their souls. Had Judah been made up solely of such people, there had been no need of further discipline. They were *the reason* why Jerusalem remained inviolate, but unfortunately they composed but a minority as they always do, of a given generation.

The majority was subject to reaction, the first phase of which was a fear of God untempered by faith. The sinners in Zion, that is the careless ones, began to reflect upon the deeper significance of that destructive providence which had checked the Assyrian in his headlong course; they were beginning to feel the heat of that tremendous fire of holiness which burned round the nations, and discovered their liability to its power; fearfulness surprised the godless ones and they began to say: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Isaiah replied: "Learn to walk uprightly, despise the gain of oppression, have done with the taking of bribes, stop your ears to the hearing of blood and shut your eyes from the seeing of evil, and you shall see the king in his beauty."

One would think that this ought to lead to repentance but it never does. It was just a craven fear

of unknown forces; terror of God had overtaken them in their sins, and their supreme wish was to get rid of it without changing their life; and being incapable of learning from experience a second phase of reaction set in: they grew weary of outward reforms; Isaiah and Hezekiah died and Manasseh, a man of their own heart, came to the throne. They lost their spiritual guides, prophets ceased among them; and having nothing left of the great deliverance but unpleasant recollections, they were content to drift; so that in less than fifteen years the nation had lost all its spiritual advantages, and had fallen into a condition of godlessness worse than before. They even began to praise Assyria's methods, for had they not made her rich and successful? A deadly calm came over the land, minds grew stale again and the whole nation settled on its lees.

The holy religion lost its attraction, simply because it was common and familiar, and since Isaiah had put the fear of God in their hearts, the thought of religion made them uncomfortable; besides many thought that it might be a good thing to adopt the gods of Assyria along with her methods; while others were in favor of reviving interest in the old Canaanitish cults with their colorful and sensuous attractions. Along with the passion for idolatry there developed hatred for the godly, and as George Adam Smith remarks, the "holy remnant became a suffering remnant." The presence of such people in the

nation was a standing rebuke; they served only to remind the masses of a God whom they would like to forget; and they varied their heathenish practices with the persecution of the saints. The temple was neglected and fell into disuse; finally they lost their Bible, and inevitably drifted towards ruin.

This was the doom of the Hebrew nation, for from that hour God determined to rid the spiritual remnant of the godless incubus. You see this in the contrast between the ministries of Isaiah and Jeremiah. One said that Jerusalem was inviolate because God had laid there a chief cornerstone; the other that Jerusalem must be taken and destroyed because God had determined to abandon her. It was Isaiah's mission to preach deliverance; seventy five years later it was Jeremiah's mission to proclaim captivity. In Jeremiah's time, the remnant, not the nation, was the unit of God's thought. Nothing short of national ruin could deliver the spiritual forces of the race from their secular limitations, and from that time onward the dominant conception of the prophets was not the Hebrew nation but the Jewish church.

God's ways are sometimes strange, always leisurely, but wonderfully effective. History vindicated Jeremiah as it did Isaiah, but it took six hundred years to do it. The Judaism that was the parent of Christianity came from those holy Jews who had refused to sell their birthright for a mess of



pottage, even though they knew that they were predestined to share in the hardships and sufferings growing out of the final rejection of the nation.

The lesson here for the United States is this, that no nation, not even one specifically selected for a great spiritual service, is immortal. A nation is only a containing vessel. The pathway of the race is littered with discarded containers: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Judea, and now autocratic Germany. What gave importance to the container was the spirit of the people. Archaeology is the study of discarded containers; history is the scrutiny of the spirit that gave them life. The spiritual quality of the people is the essential element in the durability of an organism which shares in the changeableness and mortality of all earthly things.

We must try to think of our nation in this way. There can be little doubt but that the moral well being of humanity depends in great measure on the civilization represented by Great Britain and the United States. The social and political fruits of Christianity in the western world would have been lost if Germany had won the war. To share in the preservation of such a civilization is an opportunity that comes to few peoples; but it is an opportunity, the value of which in the period of reconstruction, will depend chiefly on ourselves.

We must get rid of the popular delusion that be-

cause a nation passes through a period of trial and sacrifice, it must necessarily become a better nation. This notion is based on the assumption that spiritual effects follow from material causes; but it is contrary to the logic of history. The rapid degeneration of the Hebrew nation after the deliverance of Jerusalem ought to convince us that this pleasant supposition is a dangerous delusion. If the nation is to derive from its war experiences any permanent gains it will be because we are determined to accept the moral obligations which are the finest opportunities of the reconstruction period.

Righteousness has triumphed over organized evil only because the Allied nations determined that it should prevail. It had our approval, and our vote; we believed in the right and sustained it with intense moral passion. The sacrificial attitude towards the sacred rights of humanity was a mighty confession of faith that righteousness is the law of nations and the standard of civilizations.

The visible results of victory are obvious, but the moral fruits are quite intangible; they belong to the realm of the imponderables; and the precise relation of the successful nations to the spiritual reality that has made their triumph an assured fact appears to many uncertain and inchoate. During the stress of war moral phases appear fundamental; but when the strain is removed, there is danger of loss of vision. But if the destruction of autocratic Germany

was in the last analysis due to the inability of organized materialism to compete with moral reality; if Germany failed because she could not live in the consuming fire, which conditions all life, the supreme question for us to decide is, whether we can? Do we understand the spiritual atmosphere in which we are obliged to live? Are we aware of the righteous obligations involved in the terms on which we have been permitted to survive? And are we willing, in view of responsibilities to mankind, to live in harmony with moral reality, now that we are facing the unromantic but immensely important tasks of reconstruction? That will depend upon whether we are ready to put at the service of these obligations the same unselfish passions and sacrificial enthusiasms that made the winning of the war one of the glorious achievements of the nation.

Certain errors are to be avoided; one is that of confusing religious impressionism with a genuine spiritual change. The great war, involving as it did a fundamental moral question, called forth the somnolent idealism of the people, and through sacrificial experiences immensely increased the popular interest in religion; but is this something more than the old belief that religion is an expedient in the way of good government? We have fought for righteousness among nations, but are we determined to be righteous ourselves? Unless we turn these impressions into clear-cut convictions and accept

them as definite canons for conduct, we shall lose one of the best personal opportunities of the great struggle.

We must be particularly on our guard against reaction. The times have put fear into many hearts; but it is not the constant fear of a God who is being progressively understood and loved, so much as an episodic terror of suddenly unmasked and unknown forces, latent in human nature, and breaking out in spectacular manifestations of evil. It is a kind of fear of man; of unimaginable possibilities for ourselves; of vast social changes issuing from the war — of labor troubles, commercial rivalries and economic readjustments; — and sometimes too a susceptibility to the awful fires of moral reality that are sweeping through the world; a fear of an unknown holiness whose searching tests no man can escape. These are the anxieties that assault the mind now that we are obliged to think out the meaning of the great struggle. It is a terribly uncomfortable world we are living in, and the contemplation of the future offers little solace.

This sense of undefined fear, this terror of unknown forces, tempts men to rid themselves of it by some form of forgetfulness. Some advocate the adoption of the German method of social organization as the only safeguard of civilization. No matter how thoroughly she may have been defeated the political traditions of Germany will remain for

some time a source of anxiety. Autocracy may return again, and if so, how shall we meet it? Some will suggest a similar social discipline, others will advocate a strong military program. But we must remember the precise effect of the German method on the personality of her subjects. It turns men into things; it destroys the moral autonomy of the soul. Such a conception is absolutely opposed to the spirit of personal initiative upon which our social order is based. Political scientists, trained in universities organized on the Teutonic plan will be tempted to say that if we are to stand up against the German state we must adopt the German method. It is unthinkable. The Teuton yoke can never be imposed on the neck of the Anglo-Saxon.

But what have we got to put in its place? The Teutonic system, bad as it was, had the great merit of developing the individual into an efficient unit in social organization; it educated him in public duties, and sustained respect for constituted authority. If we are to entrust government to the free spirit of the peoples, to what shall we look for sanctions and upon what shall we depend for obedience to established law?

The world is not going back to autocratic systems; its supreme task will be to render more efficient the democratic type; but the most difficult duty of the statesman and legislator will be to educate the citizen in his public responsibilities. De-

mocracy, if let alone, settles upon individual rights rather than responsibilities. The social passion of men is now running far ahead of social discipline. The tidal forces of human desire were by the war turned into unselfish and sacrificial channels. The magnificent response of the people to the heavy responsibilities of that struggle, is an encouraging sign of a latent capacity for further development in the right direction; only the question remains: are we aware that the discipline of the citizen is even more necessary to stable government during a period of social and economic readjustment, than it was during the stress of war? If we have made the world safe for democracy, is not our present task to make democracy safe for the world? To save democracy from itself?

It is a paramount duty of the United States to take the lead in this educational movement. In speaking of the need for ordered liberty among the recently enfranchised peoples of Central Europe, President Wilson finely said: "We must hold the light steady, until they find themselves." If the fermenting masses in the war devastated countries, smarting with a sense of age long wrong, and urged on by an intensified sense of individual right are to learn the lessons of restraint and respect for constituted authority, without which their liberty will prove self-destructive, they must be made to see, not through the medium of abstract argument, but

of public example, how a great democracy conducts itself in the face of equally great temptations. That is preëminently our present task: to deserve the confidence and to inspire the emulation of other peoples, for whose enfranchisement we are jointly responsible with other nations. We must not only oppose all reactionary tendencies that would revive faith in the discarded systems, but resolve to provide sanctions for government and respect for constituted authority, without which democracy is a profound delusion.

This, in my judgment, is at bottom a religious question; it is a question of the real beliefs of a people about themselves and about God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish"; they perish because they cast off restraint. Historically speaking, where there have been no beliefs sufficiently powerful to affect the conduct of individuals, peoples have found it impossible to resist the destructive influences of unregulated desire; that is why even the most skeptical philosophers have held that religion of some kind was essential to the stability of society. It was the lack of religious beliefs that led to the downfall of Judah; and it will be our duty to make them vital elements in protecting the nations of the world from the reactionary tendencies of the times.

This constitutes the great opportunity of the Christian Church. The war was won because the moral principles of the Allied nations were more

effective than the organized materialism of Germany; and these moral principles had their source and sanction in the Christian religion. Religious principles will be even more important in the period of readjustment. It must be recognized that the Christian stands in a different relation to society, from that of the ancient Jew; for whereas the Jew was a member of a chosen race, engaged in a work of preparation and therefore capable of living in a state of detachment from other peoples, the Christian is by virtue of his larger responsibilities, in the best sense of the term a citizen of two worlds; this world and the next. He has responsibilities to both. During the stress of the war, some as was natural were too much occupied with a false apocalyptic; dreaming of a speedy end of the world, and on that account taking up an attitude of indifference towards public duty. This is not only a weak position, but it is also highly reprehensible; for Christ plainly said that the Christian was the light of *this* world, and the salt of *this* earth, and not of some cloud capped heaven, where there is abundance of light and salt is not needed.

We must have the courage to assume the bolder attitude and frankly accept the responsibility of the present. It will be our duty to increase the volume of spiritual life among men; and the mission of the church will be to compel belief in the primacy and present importance of a spiritual view of the



world. We must aid in consecrating the industrial democracy that has issued from the great struggle, to the intellectual and spiritual requirements of mankind: a tremendous task, truly, but one worthy of all acceptance. We shall best do this if we can establish belief in the Dynamic Holiness which in the long run must determine for all men and nations, the nature of reality. Such a conviction will furnish moral sanctions for government, stimulate respect for established authority, and keep the sense of public duty abreast of the social passions of the time.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HERITAGE OF TYRE

Isaiah xxiii:17-18: "It shall come to pass that the Lord will visit Tyre, and her merchandise shall be holiness to the Lord."

IN order to understand the peculiar religious influence of the Hebrew people it is necessary to pay some attention to their social and political development; and especially to consider the influence of other peoples upon their conception of themselves. It is obvious that a great religious mission could not be carried out by a people in a state of semi-barbarism such as characterized their Egyptian bondage. Before they could undertake their predestined task, they must undergo in some fashion a social and political transformation. It was for this purpose that they were brought to Palestine, and no better country could have been selected.

Situated in close proximity to the Nile and Mesopotamian valleys they were brought into immediate contact with world movements at their most impressionable period. The great trade routes passed through their borders, and from their mountain sanctuaries, they could look down upon world movements.

The consequence of this contact with other nations was the beginning of a civilizing process.

Civilization is a flexible term but it usually stands for a conception of social life larger than that of a family or a tribe. It suggests a community of interests wherein larger groups act and react upon each other until certain ideas develop; these ideas become traditions which are expressed in the laws of the land and form the basis of government; and from which there finally comes a consciousness of race — an ideal for the whole people of immense indirect cultural influence.

This is what we see going on in Palestine during the eighth and seventh centuries before Christ; — the slow and orderly development of a loose aggregation of tribes into something like a nation, with a powerful racial consciousness. This civilizing process was largely influenced by contact with the life and manners of other nations.

The religious mission of the people was the decisive factor in their development; and the lead in this civilizing process was taken by the prophets, the greatest of whom appeared in the most critical period of Hebrew life. Their mission was a double one. First they were the preachers and spiritual guides of the people. They came to warn, rebuke, instruct and to console. But in addition to this, they were charged with the larger task of interpreting world forces in terms of Divine providence; of ex-

plaining the significance of those transforming and often painful contacts between the chosen people and the gentile nations.

While most of them excelled in this kind of service, Isaiah by reason of his extraordinary talents and the singularly propitious times in which he lived, stands preëminent and alone. He had a mind of vast range and perfectly understood the significance of world movements. The two forces acting most directly upon the development of the Hebrew peoples were war and commerce. We have hitherto been concerned entirely with the first of these influences, due to the advent of Assyria in Palestine. In this chapter the prophet calls our attention to the other force: commerce, as represented by the Phœnician, centering in the maritime activities of Tyre, the great seaport of Palestine.

This chapter is of the greatest importance to us now, since the most serious problem confronting us is the control of the industrial democracy which has issued from the war. For more than a century the life of western nations, particularly that of the United States, has been increasingly influenced by commerce and industrialism; but the war has brought this process to a climax; and our supreme and all but superhuman task will be to consecrate this tremendous force to righteous ends, and compel it by sheer idealistic strength to serve the needs of the intellectual and spiritual man. Such a feeling seems

to have influenced Isaiah; for he rightly understood the formative influence of commerce on civilization; he was keenly alive to the corrupting effect of Phœnician enterprise, but he shows his greatness in no finer way than that he was able to see the immense value of this force, if it could be consecrated to spiritual uses. This is the significance of the Oracle on Tyre. If Judah was to fulfil her spiritual mission she must not only overcome Assyria, but find a medium which could carry her religious ideas to other peoples. Here already fitted was the common carrier. If God could control commerce, Isaiah saw the world at His feet.

The rôle of Phœnicia was determined by her geographical position. If you will look at a map of Palestine you will see a narrow strip of land not wider at any point than fifteen miles, running from Mount Carmel, north to the borders of Syria, to the extent of one hundred and forty miles. To the east is an impassable mountain range; to the north and south outlets only for trade routes, while towards the west limited only by the imagination lay the sea. Naturally a people so situated would be compelled to find their future on the sea. Their location predestined the Phœnicians to become a nation of merchants and traders, and nothing else. Their land was too poor in natural resources and too small in extent to become either an agricultural or manufacturing country; but lying midway as it were between

Egypt and Mesopotamia ; in the closest possible contact with the land trade routes it was inevitable that they should become a trading people. And since the chief need of a trading nation is markets, they naturally sought to develop these in the lands touched by the sea.

The Phœnicians developed the art of navigation, learning how to steer by the stars, and sail at night out of sight of land ; and their ships covered the bounds of the known seas. They were the first to navigate the Mediterranean ; founded colonies in the *Ægean Isles* ; in Greece and in Northern Africa at Carthage ; in Sicily and Corsica ; in Spain at Tarshish ; and pressed through the pillars of Hercules to Western Spain and as far north as Britain. They had trading posts in every known country : in Egypt and Mesopotamia and on the far Indian Ocean.

It is difficult to overestimate the extent and variety of Tyrian commercial activity. No wonder the prophet's imagination took fire when he saw this tremendous force lying there at the disposal of religion. The flag of the Hudson Bay Company has on it the letters H. B. C. which are interpreted by the natives as meaning "Here before Christ." It is historically true that religious influence has usually followed the path opened for it by commerce ; the missionary comes after the man of business.

The Oracle on Tyre seems to have been called forth by the danger of its extinction through As-

syrian conquests. The genius of Assyria was purely destructive; that Isaiah well understood; and when he saw the Phœnician influence, bad as it was, at the mercy of this destructive power, he came to the conclusion that God would not permit the dispersion of a people whose activities were unconsciously of immense value to the spread of religion and civilization. He saw of course that Assyria would take Tyre; but he confidently predicted her restoration; and although she would continue to practise her arts — prostituting her soul for worldly gain — God proposed to use her for missionary purposes. The Lord would visit Tyre, and her merchandise would become holiness unto Him. She would continue to be an unwilling servant, unaware of the larger implications of her history; but God designed to make her influence a blessing to mankind.

A prediction of such large comprehensiveness was bound to meet with the vindication of history. Phœnicia remained to the end a nation of traders and middlemen — “sea peddlers,” and nothing more; she left no abiding deposit in the culture or civilization of the world of her own creation; she was of no more consequence than a train of cars, vital as a common carrier, but of herself material, a thing and nothing more; yet in the great days that followed, after the Babylonian exile, and especially when Alexander the Great opened the east to the west, the trade routes and commercial connections established

by Phœnicia became the arteries through which the rich red blood of new ideas and transforming forces passed swiftly over the world. Phœnicia was the first to make the world smaller; to open communications between remote nations, to convey the educational and spiritualizing influences of different peoples to each other, and make them the common possession of the race. As such she was a civilizing influence of vast import, not on account of anything she contributed of herself, but because she made accessible what other peoples had; above all she opened the way for the spread of religion, and in spite of herself she became a missionary of the Lord. Her commerce became holiness unto God; and from her blind, molelike striving after worldly gain, the world derived vast spiritual advantages.

We are so accustomed to think of the Hebrews as a commercial people that we overlook the fact that in Isaiah's time commercial pursuits were by them regarded with a certain amount of aversion. This was the fixed conviction of the devout. They looked upon Phœnicia as a harlot among nations, ready to sell herself for hire. Isaiah was quite aware of this but it was due to his spiritual genius that he could look beyond the parochialism of his time to see in this force, admittedly evil, an influence if consecrated that would be of great service to spiritual Israel. This is the significance of the Oracle on Tyre. It suggests the duty of trying to understand



the force of commerce; it must neither be destroyed, nor wholly condemned, but used and consecrated to high ministries for the soul.

The Christian people of our day have been accustomed to an indiscriminating condemnation of commerce. If one listen to the preacher in his Sabbath-day mood one would suppose that nothing could be more evil or dangerous. The reason for this is that the commercial spirit, if left to itself, soon degenerates into pure materialism; but the responsibility felt by Isaiah is precisely the one we should awake to, namely to see beyond condemnation to utility. Commerce is a dangerous, but useful force; the Christian cannot first make the world to fit his mission, but he must take it as he finds it and try to improve it; and we may as well face the fact that the sort of world we are going to live in is one that is to be increasingly occupied with commercial matters.

Our nation, idealistic as it is, has largely been developed by the commercial spirit. This was due in part to our geographical position and in part to the native energy of our people. Situated in a land of enormous natural resources, midway between European and Oriental peoples, it was predestined that we should become a commercial nation. Add to this the native trading propensity of the people, the resourcefulness, energy and audacity of the individual — the splendid initiative encouraged by our free

institutions and the additional advantage of a long peace and comparative freedom from internal disturbances — moving towards the future with few hampering traditions, and you have the reason why there should have been such a rapid industrial development in this country. All these advantages have made us masters of the material world, and developed to an alarming degree business aspirations and incidentally our ideals of life.

Industrial expansion has been enormously accelerated in the reconstruction period, not only by the extraordinary economic necessities of the war devastated countries, but also because the great struggle increased to an astonishing degree the wants and desires of the masses. The intellectual, moral and æsthetic requirements of the world have been vastly augmented; and life for everybody is going to be more expensive, and unless stabilized by access to the resources of the spirit, it is going to be more feverish, discontented, and dangerous. Our nation faces a problem such as has not hitherto confronted it: how are we going to meet it? Are we going to return to the old materialistic ambitions which influenced us before the war: fighting each other with ruthless competition, and organizing our resources solely with regard to the animal necessities of life? Are we to sacrifice the idealistic gains of the war — the intellectual and moral awakening due to patriotic

devotion — for the sake of Mammon worship? If so, the war is well lost. But if we are to avoid a return to the old way of living we must learn how to consecrate the augmented commercial activities of the time to a spiritual end. We shall need the courage and confidence of Isaiah, reënforced at all points by a sturdy Christian faith. It is a great task, and the time is calling loudly for great men to meet it. But its complete solution will not be found by political scientists, statesmen, labor leaders or big business men; the unselfish labors of all these will be required; we shall need in addition prophets — pathfinders of the soul — who shall be able to open the way to life's Supreme Reality, without belief in which no adequate solution is possible.

The acceptance of this proposition will not be easy, for it calls upon us to revise our conception of religion, it urges us to a searching examination of our public and private morality. Perhaps we shall be able to do so, however, if we consider the danger of the commercial spirit, estimate its present influence on public opinion, and then try to define our relation to it.

The danger of the commercial spirit is, as Isaiah points out, that it tests everything by profit and loss. Its standards of value are of themselves material. The Tyrians were merchants and traders, and nothing else. They traveled about the ancient world with packs on their backs, taking as little

interest in the higher aspirations of the people with whom they traded as a wandering peddler. They manufactured nothing, they created nothing artistic. They seem to have had no higher aim than to "buy cheap and sell dear," the creed of Trimalchio, the story of whose clownish antics forms the most amusing pages of the *Satyricon* of Petronius. They developed markets in the west for the products of the east by stimulating desire for these things; they were the common carriers of the world's wealth, but they tested the value of everything, even of religion (for they bought and sold gods and religions too), by profit and loss. Such a pursuit was bound to destroy what little idealism they had; for their business ambitions brought them in contact with neither moral nor spiritual aspirations; and so they soon became for all intents and purposes thoroughly material. They looked like money and talked of money, and money became their god.

Has not this been one of the dangers inseparable from our rapid industrial development: this passion for gain, this limitation of standards of value to profit and loss? As George Adam Smith remarks, the artist, the teacher or even the artisan has other interests in life than those associated with material wealth; their callings furnish them with certain ideal aims, and the satisfaction of the creative impulse is often the most important. It is not so with the merchant or trader; his standard in business

is profit and loss; and unless he can bring to his calling ideals of one sort or another, which must be formed in other and higher spheres, it is almost impossible to resist the corrupting influences of trade.

So far the American people have succeeded in checking this evil tendency; it is because we are at heart an idealistic nation. Still the unconsecrated commercialism of the time has had a decidedly vicious effect on public opinion. There are many who value everything in terms of money; they do not believe that anybody can be influenced by any other standard than personal gain, and regard those who profess to be idealists either as fanatics or hypocrites. This is the belief of all those who accept the standard: business is business. If so, then as Sidney Lanier says: "It is only war grown miserly."

Such a spirit influences the world as an atmosphere; we live in it at least six days a week, and it is difficult to escape its poisonous effects, unless we bring principles and ideals, formed in other and higher regions to bear upon it; and in spite of our native idealism, it is rather discouraging to turn to the general opinions of life that prevail among the practical people. For instance we hear much of the platitude that "honesty, is the best policy" which to most men means simply that honesty is better than dishonesty because it pays better. A man who has no higher aim than this will become dishonest, so soon as it becomes more profitable. Or take the

phrase: "truth in advertising" which, unless one define the terms may only mean that it pays in the long run to tell the truth. Such a man cannot command the confidence of his business associates on these terms simply because his morality is founded, not on any fixed principles of an ethical nature, but entirely on unstable external conditions; and if these conditions should change at any time, he would in all probability act on another principle.

This Phœnician morality is as untrustworthy today as it was centuries ago, and yet if we are to believe Benjamin Kidd, it has had a decided influence on our higher ethical judgments. For instance during the past fifty years the civilized nations have been condemning war; have sought by means of courts of arbitration to render it impossible; and yet the usual reason given was not that war is wrong in principle, but that it is inexpedient, on the ground that it is wasteful and very expensive. It does not pay. Germany seems to have reasoned in this fashion about the probable attitude of Belgium, Great Britain and America towards her scheme of world dominion. She did not believe that these nations would expose themselves to such vast material waste, for so intangible a thing as national honor. This intangible ideal something we call honor — faith among nations and such like conceptions — from the point of view of materialism appear to be delusions. The immense moral gains of the war have come from a dis-

covery that we are at heart idealistic, that we do believe in the imponderables; and so far we have been able to escape the blight of commercialism.

Still there is little reason for optimism because there were many Phoenicians among the patriots during the war, who looked at it entirely from the point of view of personal profit. There were some whose souls were dead to idealism and sacrifice: profiteers in capital and in labor, creatures of a materialistic age. Think of the output of shoddy goods, the gouging and grinding that went on all over the land, of the people who tried to turn the misfortunes of the world to personal profit, and nothing else; and then compare with this the splendid loyalty, and unselfish idealism of the greater part of the nation, and you will see how ugly and indefensible this spirit is. No wonder Isaiah called Tyre a harlot, ready to barter everything she had, even honor, for gain. Consider too the hideous ugliness of modern civilization, these hot, foul, noisy cities, corrupters of the imagination, destroyers of the souls of men through crass utilitarianism; this paralysis of the finer mental powers through a commercialized conception of education, and you will see a further effect of this spirit when uncontrolled by principles of an idealistic sort.

The truth is that modern industrialism has been founded upon the law of the survival of the fittest. It was the ruling principle of Germany in the great

war. She despised small nations, and reasoned that their destruction or absorption into the Germanic empire was fully justified on the ground that the strongest have a right to survive. It has been too the principle upon which modern capitalism and organized labor have founded their hopes. If big business could combine, even through ruthless disregard of the rights of small concerns, its action was justified on the ground of a larger public service; if labor could organize in such a way as to get more for its product than it was entitled to, its success fully justified the means — thus have men reasoned about government, business and labor, and brought the civilization of the twentieth century almost to destruction.

This is *the* danger that confronts us in the reconstruction period. Shall society return to the old Phœnician morality; this tendency to act on the supposition that there are no higher interests in life than those of personal, material gain? Or shall we make the unselfish and sacrificial ideals called forth by the war the law of public and private action, now that the war is over? This will depend upon our beliefs about ourselves, about the rights and duties of mankind, and particularly about our relation to God.

But here too we see the evil influence of commercialism, on our estimate of religion. The general



opinion about religion, intensified by the great struggle, is that it is a very good thing to have in the community. It makes democracy safe for the world; it furnishes sanctions for government, and encourages respect for constituted authority; it puts the fear of God into the rich man's heart, and makes the workman content with his wage. This is the common view of religion as an expedient.

But while many are disposed to admit that religion has a utilitarian value, they act on the supposition that it makes very little difference what the private individual believes; and this view is common among those who are influenced by the commercial spirit of the time. But if the molders of public opinion — newspaper and magazine editors, statesmen and law makers — are to hold no higher view than this, they occupy, as little as they know it, precisely the position of those foolish statesmen and false teachers so severely condemned by the true prophets of God; for should you be able to convince them that some other expedient for stabilizing society could be found, they would be ready to adopt it simply because it worked: that is, because it paid. Such men are not the true friends of humanity. We cannot trust the idealism of America, so greatly quickened by the war, to unsafe guides; it is too precious, yet, for lack of reasonable religious supports, too unstable to be committed to unreliable

leaders; it must be worked into worthy forms of public service through the influence of definite religious beliefs.

It has been customary to maintain that it matters little what one believes about God; but I think the great war has convinced us that it does. The Turk believed in God and yet on that account was able to murder more than a million and a half of innocent people. Could this have happened in a Christian land? Why were the Allies able through four long years of hardship, suffering and death to struggle with Germany until their cause was won but that they believed in the sovereignty of right, they hated wrong, and they derived their moral passion from their beliefs about God? Could such a war have been originated in a country influenced by the ethical and religious standards prevailing among the Allied peoples? It is unthinkable. Germany began the war because of certain beliefs about God; we won it because we too had other and different beliefs. The German god was as little like the God of Jesus Christ as the brutal Assyrian deities resembled the God of Isaiah.

If the winning of the war has been a triumph of righteousness, if Germany has collapsed because she could not live in the fires of holy reality that condition the life of men and nations: how shall we escape in the reconstruction period if we neglect so great salvation? Can we dwell in the midst of

the devouring fire? Can we survive in the everlasting burnings? That will depend upon the effectiveness of our beliefs in controlling and consecrating the great industrial movement that has issued from the struggle. The hope of the future is with Christian peoples.

We must consecrate the forces of civilization to the spread of true religion. This will be done first of all by preaching the saving gospel of Jesus Christ; but back of this is something more important. There must be the testimony of the life — the actual application of God's will to the totality of influence. This means that all double standards of morality must disappear. The world has had enough of the double standard hypothesis in the immoral principles of the German state. As men conduct themselves in private life, so must they behave in public affairs. Christian ethics must become the standard of international relations; the basis of ordered liberty among peoples. Such an ideal morality based on the sound beliefs of the individual must become the law for business combinations and labor organizations, until the whole industrial movement is inspired by the spirit of brotherhood and made to serve the higher necessities of the soul.

We have seen what commerce did in the ancient world for the spread of culture, civilization and religion. The merchandise of Tyre became holiness unto the Lord. What it did then, it can do now.

It was a potent force in aid of missionary enterprise; Christianity has always followed the trade routes of the world, and it will continue to do so, until the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.

Great believers — men of the single standard for all private and public relations — have always been the light of the world, the salt of the earth. They are the hope of the democracy that is spreading over the world; and their influence upon society and government has been the direct outcome of personal loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; for through Him alone has mankind access unto the Parent Source of Reality, to live in harmony with which is the safeguard of human rights, and the sanction of human institutions.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE THREE QUESTIONS

Isaiah xxxiii: 20-22: "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation. . . . There the glorious Lord shall be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams. . . . For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; He will save us."

THIS beautiful prediction is the essence of Isaiah's message. One of the purposes of his long ministry was the consolation and encouragement of the devout people who were called upon to endure great hardships in the struggle of Judah with Assyria. What they required as a basis of steadfast faith was some assurance that their holy city was inviolate; for should it be taken and the population scattered over Mesopotamia, there appeared no possible way of realizing their spiritual destiny. Was it to happen to them as it had happened to northern Israel? Isaiah answered this reasonable question with the doctrine of inviolability. God had laid in Zion, a chief cornerstone, elect, tried, and precious. It was impossible at this time for Assyria to take Jerusalem, because the spiritual future of the race depended on the political autonomy of the chosen people. This prediction was fulfilled by the great de-

liverance. When Sennacherib abandoned the siege of the city, and retired from Palestine at the close of the eighth century, Jerusalem became a quiet habitation; and the spiritual element in the nation was given an opportunity of reflecting on other significant features of the prophet's teaching.

For some years before the deliverance of the city, Isaiah had been speaking of a time coming, it might be soon or late, when God would give Judah a great spiritual leader, who should deliver them from all their enemies. In the darkest hour of their history he had confidently predicted that Jerusalem would become a quiet habitation; the Lord Himself would be unto them a place of broad rivers and streams, their judge, lawgiver, and king. Above all things He would become their deliverer.

Promises of this kind are frequently found in the Old Testament prophets; they are Messianic in character because they look forward to the coming of Christ. A certain degree of caution, however, is required for their interpretation. The prophets usually speak of the Messiah in vague and general terms; His features are outlined in a few bold strokes on the picturesque and mobile background of their own times; and to do them justice we must avoid the habit of making them teach too much. We must not read into the Old Testament teaching the clearly defined revelations of the New Testament. Where such a mistake is made these prophecies,

otherwise so suggestive and valuable, are rendered wholly artificial and unconvincing. Having the knowledge of the historic Christ, it is easy to interpret prophecy in terms of this larger experience; still we must try to do what is almost impossible: put ourselves in place of the prophets, who were looking down the centuries and seeking as best they could to use the materials at hand for the encouragement of the people of their own age. We shall not always find there what we should like to see, but at least we shall be able to grasp the significance of what these prophecies mean.

Messianic prophecies fall into three groups: some are concerned only with the permanence of the Divine kingdom. Isaiah's reference to the inviolability of Jerusalem is an example of that; a declaration of God's purpose to safeguard the chosen people until they could fulfil their mission and give Christianity to the world. A second group is occupied with the saving influence of God's people on other nations, looking forward to the calling of the Gentiles. A third group, by far the most interesting, deals with Messianic prophecy from a personal point of view. It describes the birth, growth, character and power of a great personality; and it is to prophecies of this sort that we turn, when we desire to know how the faith of the Jew was shaped up to receive and understand the advent of Jesus Christ.

Messianic prophecy of a personal sort is characteristic of Isaiah's teaching. This teaching is necessarily sketchy, often hurriedly spoken to his intimate disciples in the midst of more pressing matters. Apparently it was not intended for the rulers or the multitude, but only for those whose faith was ready to receive it. It is therefore private teaching. He presents his ideas in the form of portraits — sketched on time's horizon like Rembrandt etchings — a few bold strokes and much left to the imagination, and they must have powerfully moved the sensibility of the newly aroused people. The prophet's conceptions appear to have come to him in the form of visions; and two things, as F. S. Oliver has pointed out are essential to the power of a vision: "some exceptional gift of presentment in the seer, and an eager predisposition on the part of men." A genuine prophet is not one who sees a thing for the first time, but one who sees clearly what many are seeing dimly. It is his business to fully open the eyes, to teach the stammering tongue to speak plainly; to strip the wrappings of tradition from the face of truth, that men may see it whole. And if we are to realize the power and beauty of Isaiah's predictions concerning the Messiah, we must dismiss at once the popular notion of some magic gift of insight into far distant futures, and seek the true understanding in the needs and spiritual expectancy of the godly



people of his time. For as Oliver finely says: "the fabric of a vision which worketh great marvels is the experience of common men."

What then was the fabric of Isaiah's Messianic vision? Out of what materials was it woven? You will find the elements partly in his own experience, and partly in the spiritual expectancy of the nation; and it is not difficult to understand why the conscious requirements of the people should prove a decisive factor. Their provisional need, in the days of political and social disorders, growing out of the Assyrian invasion was assurance of Jerusalem's inviolability; but the political independence of the city was a means only for realizing a spiritual mission. The devout people knew very well that without this they could never fulfil their destiny; and it was inevitable that satisfaction in the security of the city should depend in great measure on their confidence in the national leaders. We have seen how little reason they had for trusting their rulers. The nation was drifting rapidly towards complete secularization, and their keen disappointment naturally raised the question: How can we fulfil our mission unless God gives us a man whom we can follow and trust? This made the personal aspect of Messianic prophecy intensely important; and this is why Isaiah took the opportunity of speaking of the Messiah in such terms as to satisfy this expectation.

But a very definite personal need had grown up in the religious experience of the people: a need for a closer touch with God, a desire to be assured that He in some experimental fashion shared their afflictions; so that their interest in the Messiah tended to center in their personal needs. No promise of safeguarding their spiritual destiny could satisfy their faith unless at the same time it could meet the urgent and growing necessities of their souls.

They began to ask questions, first of each other, and then of their prophet, and these questions would finally resolve themselves into three, touching Messiah's experience, character, and power.

The first question touched the experience of the Messiah: Would He be like them, identified through experience and race relationships with their struggling life, so that from the first He would become a sympathetic and discriminating friend? The second question had to do with His character: was He able to live in the devouring fire of holiness, which they had been taught to regard as the sole condition of reality for men and nations and things? The third question would concern itself with His power, and the mode of its operation: would He be able to protect, shelter and strengthen those that were weak and ineffective until they had grown strong, and would they be able through His fellowship to find a standard by which to test life, to sift out the true from the false, and to know the real from the unreal?

These were questions which Isaiah found in the hearts of his generation, and they had a decisive influence on the form of his Messianic predictions.

The familiar prophecy concerning the birth of Immanuel, contained in the seventh chapter was designed to answer the question regarding the experience of Messiah. It was projected on the dark background of political intrigue and maladministration that had characterized the reign of Ahaz. Threatened with invasion from his northern neighbors, Ahaz, against Isaiah's advice had made a treaty with Assyria, as destructive of Hebrew hopes as was the treaty of Brest-Litovsk to Russia. Isaiah understood what serious consequences would follow this foolish alliance; he also realized how it would influence the believing remnant. They were caught in a terrible predicament; hardship, suffering and even death awaited them; besides their spiritual expectations were completely frustrated. Here was a weak and wicked ruler, leaguings himself with pagan powers, adopting foreign gods from Damascus and Phœnicia, and ready for the sake of temporary peace to expose the nation to final destruction. What could the godly do in such a time? To whom could they turn for support? And to them in this critical hour the prophet came with the great conception of Immanuel, God-with-us. Recall for a moment, Isaiah's doctrine of holiness, as an all-pervading atmosphere — a devouring fire

that burned round men and nations and things — and you can understand with what fear and trembling the spiritually sensitive people would regard the doings of Ahaz, whose pagan alliances seemed to expose Zion to a tempest of destructive fire. They wanted assurance of protection and safety, but most of all encouragement in order to endure the hardships of that terrible time. But this was just their difficulty: for God could not sympathize with them unless He came in contact with their experience, and how could He do this unless He shared their afflictions? God's omnipotence was of course a familiar postulate of Hebrew theology; Isaiah's teaching had given them a fresh sense of the awful, active holiness; but these attributes — elements in the Divine glory — seemed to render the idea of suffering in God unthinkable. Suffering was clearly weakness, and this was inconsistent with omnipotence; it might also be a form of punishment and how could this be reconciled with the Divine holiness?

Such thinking was too painful for them, and they brought the problem to Isaiah, who met it with the doctrine that God intended to enter into the closest possible contact with the human race. He would become an experimental partaker in its natural weaknesses: be born a helpless babe, grow up among them as a tender plant. His nourishment should be "butter and honey," the food of the poor and

the oppressed — a wonderful revelation in that early age. The Jew did not fully understand this doctrine until after the Babylonian exile; but its essence is in this prophecy of Isaiah. By taking His share in the sufferings of the race God becomes a place of broad rivers and streams: a Judge, Law-giver, and King — essentially a Deliverer and Savior.

All practical thinking about God should begin here, for life as we know it is three-parts pain; and the most realistic contacts between the human and Divine nature are made through the medium of sacrificial experience. If our conception of God is formal and abstract, it is because we have ignored those attractive human elements which are manifested in the incarnation. In Jesus Christ God has joined the caravan of our life for weal or woe, and cannot be separated from us until He has brought forth judgment unto victory. How near and comprehensible He becomes when it is recognized that there is no pain or agony of the human spirit, but that He knows it already, and that through the most effective of mediums — experience. This great truth, that God can and does suffer with and for man, Isaiah brought home to the hearts of his generation — this amazing message concerning a little child who should become “Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Mighty God and Savior.”

The second question concerning the character of

the great leader Isaiah answered with the prophecy of Messiah's spiritual endowment contained in the eleventh chapter. This prediction follows closely that of the final destruction of Assyria. It is easy to see that the declaration of Assyria's approaching collapse aroused the keenest interest among the devout. It was a demonstration of the power of Isaiah's ruling conception that God was active, dynamic holiness — an atmosphere of fire, burning round men and nation and things. Assyria was doomed because she was unreal; but how would it fare with the people of Judah? Could they live in the holy fire? Could they dwell amid the everlasting burnings? Such thoughts were calculated to disturb the most sincere and faithful people. A great fear took hold of them, a dread of reality such as the prophet himself had experienced on that vision day long ago when he saw the Lord. In the year that king Uzziah died Isaiah had learned the difference between the nation and a Divine kingdom; he discovered the distinction between religion and patriotic devotion; above all he was made to feel the unlikeness of God to the stereotyped conceptions of the popular theology. God was essential reality; the whole earth was full of manifested holiness — this all-consuming, unescapable fire that determined the nature of reality for men and nations. He felt his utter unfitness to live in such a world, and from it issued a supreme need of a deliverer, a savior.

What Isaiah experienced in vision, the people of Judah realized by the slow progress of events. The approaching destruction of Assyria seems to have roused this dread of the future to its maximum power. How could they hope to live in the great fire? And if they were unfit to survive, was not the finding of a savior a prime necessity? Isaiah had promised such a deliverer in the person of the Messiah. It was a very consoling thought to remember that He would come into contact with man through participation in his sufferings; but it was not enough to believe that Messiah understood human life; the deeper question was: Can He live above man's life and limitations? If He is to save those who are utterly unfit to dwell in the everlasting burnings, can He himself survive? This is a supreme necessity for every awakened soul: not only to be assured of the likeness of the deliverer to man, but also to be convinced that He is unlike man in those very attributes that fit Him for living in harmony with God; and Isaiah met the need with the great prophecy concerning Messiah's spiritual endowment. The essential truth in this prophecy is the assertion that the fire of holiness is the very breath of Messiah's life. He lives in the atmosphere of righteousness, because He is in perfect harmony with it. What is holiness but to feel God's reality; to feel it in some deep, elemental sense, as the foundation of peace and safety? The absence of a sense

of harmony with God is the source of all human anxieties. It was this urgent necessity for peace that brought Isaiah's generation to the point where it could comprehend the essential fitness of the Messiah for the rôle of deliverer. The Messiah commands the spiritual world; He is not only able to dwell in it, but He is fitted to enable others to dwell there also — this is the essence of Isaiah's teaching. It must have been a consoling thought for his generation, as it is for ours; for our confidence in the fitness of Christ to save us, is based not simply upon His experimental participation in our life, but also upon the perception of His essential difference from us, the sense of His perfect harmony with God. It is the apprehension of His holiness that enables us to believe in His love. It was Isaiah's identification of the Messiah with God in the highest of His attributes, that enabled him to give to the devout people of his time a most powerful and personal motive for obedience. They were made to realize that their strength and peace did not rest upon an impersonal foundation, but upon fellowship with a God who was to become increasingly real to them as their faith was concentrated on the coming Redeemer.

But a third question remained: How would Messiah's power reveal itself, and what effect would it have on human society? This question is answered in the great prophecy of the thirty second



chapter. The Messiah shall be unto men "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." George Adam Smith's description of this phrase is very suggestive: In Palestine where the fertile land joins the desert you often see this thing: some early spring day a playful breeze will bring a seed out of the deep, cool forest and drop it into a little patch of fertile soil, on the edge of the desert. The seed takes root, and becomes a little plant, pushing its glad way up through the soil with the promise of life. And then what happens? There comes a wind — it may be the sirocco, it may be the Mediterranean breeze — and drifts the sand slowly but surely over the little plant, and smothers out its young life. But if you set a rock there on the edge of the desert, and drop the seed behind it, it will grow just the same; but when the sand drifts, the rock will catch it on its unsheltered side, and the plant will become a great tree. That is a picture of the Messiah's tender and thoughtful ministry. There is too much glare and glitter in the world; too much exposure of sensitive surfaces to alien influences. What men need is protection and shelter in the formative stages of life. Isaiah's disciples felt this need keenly. They were ready for the ordeal by fire; but they dreaded a too sudden application of its tremendous heat; what they wanted was something that would temper purging ministries with kindness and compassion. The Messiah by His

love and consideration would be unto them a great rock in a weary land. In His strength they should find shelter and quiet. The practical ministries of Christ have abundantly fulfilled this prophecy. One of the most destructive forces of life is a recollection of a past blunder. The world quickly forgets our virtues, but has a long memory for our falls. What would have become of Simon Peter, who denied his Lord because he was afraid of the chattering tongue of a servant girl, had it not been for the protecting shadow of a great love? The Savior put Himself between Peter's memory and Peter's sin, and he could never after think of his fall without thinking of Christ. This was Isaiah's conception of the tenderness and consideration of redeeming love.

The ideal of the promised leader, wrought partly from the prophet's intuitions, and partly from the urgent questioning of the people became the standard by which to test the political and religious leadership of the time. Isaiah's disciples were responsible members of the chosen race, they had positive relations to both church and state: how then were they to judge their rulers? What were they to think of politics? How estimate the worth of social remedies? Above all else what were they to think of world movements in relation to their religious destiny? In these prophecies, Isaiah lifts the mind of his generation above the low level of

political expediency to contemplate the permanent gains that were coming out of the trials and tribulations of the time. In the world convulsions God was proving Himself an active, militant holiness, a devouring and cleansing fire; but He will not leave the nation comfortless or without leadership; the Messiah shall be one of the people, closely identified with their sufferings and hardships, yet capable not only of dwelling in the fire that was to determine the reality of all created things, but able to cause others to live in it also; knowledge of whose character would fix the standard of value for all practical affairs.

Under the influence of this Mighty Personality one's view of life would be brought into harmony with truth: "the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly."

History bears this out. Martin Luther did not cause the reformation; there were multitudes all over Christendom that wanted a change; but they spoke of it with stammering tongues because they could not think clearly; they had no courage until the iron-jawed monk stood up before the world and uttered the great word that coördinated their thoughts and loosed their tongues. Luther taught the stammerer to speak plainly. This was Isaiah's service to his

generation. The Messiah was coming, be it soon or late; and under the influence of this glorious expectation the people attained to a clearer understanding of the times, and were enabled to look beyond the tumult of nations and the fall of dynasties to the advent of a permanent kingdom, in which all spiritual aspirations should be realized.

What is our generation to make of these things? We have gained from our study of Isaiah and his times, a simplified conception of the Almighty; he has taught us to think of God as an active, dynamic holiness — an atmosphere of fire that determines the reality of all created things. Autocratic Germany has fallen because she could not live in the devouring flame; the Allied nations and the United States have so far been permitted to survive because there was in the purposes of those peoples an indestructible deposit of moral reality. Passionate moral principle determined the issue of the struggle; it sustained the *morale* of the nations during four years of exceptional hardships; and it is impossible to resist the conviction that this moral passion was due to the direct influence of Christianity on Western civilization. It has been a holy war, involving many fundamental truths of religion. What is national honor? What is right and what is wrong? What are sanctions for governments? What is the nature and value of personal sacrifice? All these questions directed the mind into religious

channels; and the effort to answer them by personal dedication to the cause led to something like a religious experience. All that was implied in the assertion of the righteousness of our cause was a confession of faith in the fundamental truth that only the real can last; and that reality was in every case to be determined by moral relationships.

But are we aware of the implications of such a belief? For if the successful issue of the war has demonstrated the power of right over wrong, it has done so only because there is a ruling Providence in the world that makes it so. Moral experiences of this elemental character bring individuals into direct relations with God. It was true in Isaiah's time; it is true to-day. If the dynamic holiness of God determines the life of nations, it also conditions the life of individuals. Whether we like it or not, we are obliged to live in the atmosphere of fire; and only the real can survive it.

Survival in such an atmosphere may be of two kinds. We may live in it if we are fit for it; or lacking this, we may survive if we find a redeemer who can. This is the meaning of Isaiah's Messianic prophecies. The supreme necessity for people in his time was personal religion. The moral urgencies of their experience forced them to realize the need for a Savior; they wanted closer relations with God which could only be gained through a Mediator and Friend. Some such experience has come to our gen-

eration. Once more the grave question rises in the human heart: How shall we live in the cleansing fire? How shall we survive the devouring flame? What is our answer going to be?

Modern indifference to personal religion has been due in great measure to ignorance of God's nature; for without belief in the holy significance of life, it is not worth while to talk about a Savior. But once let men become aware of the holy atmosphere that surrounds this planet, and realize their unfitness to live in it, and the need for a Savior becomes imperative.

The war has taught us the monstrous power of evil which the advance of civilization and the safeguards of intelligence have not been able to check. If the Allied nations had been without moral principle, they would have lost the war; but now this principle has turned upon the individual life and become a standard of criticism for the self. The dangerous possibilities in human nature have set many on fresh quests for peace and safety; there is a general feeling that such may be satisfied in closer relations with God. On the whole the awakening due to the war has brought to our generation a great but fleeting opportunity; our permanent gains will depend upon whether we appreciate what God has done to save the world from itself. The times are bringing us face to face with Jesus Christ. The heart of His gospel is suffering for others — the

sacrifice of the One for the benefit of the many; and the sacrificial experiences of the war have enabled us to comprehend the fundamental appeal of the Christian religion.

We have an opportunity of learning how to understand the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." This means that without the sacrifice of life no evil thing can be put away. The pathway along which all the moral and spiritual benefits of the race have come is marked by the graves of those who lived and died for the right. Without shedding of blood, there is no remission — this is the message of the casualty lists. Our young men have given their lives for us; they have made the world safe for democracy; but this does not save the world from its sins. The terrible outbreak in the German state was but a manifestation of the power of evil over human nature. The shedding of patriot blood has put away an economic evil; but Christ alone can deal with the fundamental cause, which is sin — alienation from God. The blood of our young men is calling loudly from the fields of France, to the living, to put at the service of the nation during the reconstruction period the same spirit of sacrifice and devotion; but above all else it calls us to consider how we can fundamentally remove the cause which produces such evil effects on states and peoples; and only faith in the sacrificial power of the Son

of God can accomplish that. This urgently requires the examination of motives and purposes; especially does it compel us to think of ourselves as spirits, fronting eternity, with primary responsibilities to God.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to make the world safe for our souls. Through Him alone can we be reconciled to God and fitted to live in the consuming fires of His holiness.

Great believers are the hope of the world in a time of social readjustment. F. S. Oliver has spoken of "some rare occasions scattered through history, where as if by a common impulse, humanity has paused in its work, and, leaning on its spade, has looked round bewildered by a sudden hopefulness; aware dimly that something fortunate has happened, that a new man has appeared in the world, and that he is a friend." This is a fine description of the present temper of peoples. Multitudes in all nations are seeking a larger self-expression in democratic forms of government. The stabilizing influence in a democracy has always issued from the spirit of the people whose sacrificial purposes furnished sanctions for government and maintained respect for constituted authority. This spirit is always found in a certain class — the typical product of God. The Christian is and always has been this kind of man. Under his influence the eyes of them that see shall not be dim; the ears of them



that hear shall hearken; the heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly; and if this generation is to deserve the benefits that have come to it through the sacrifice of others; if we are going to keep the world a fit place in which to live, we must give fundamental effect to the precepts of the Christian religion in the domain of public service, as well as in the sphere of private life. Wherefore, seeing that we face such grave responsibilities, "let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

**THE END**



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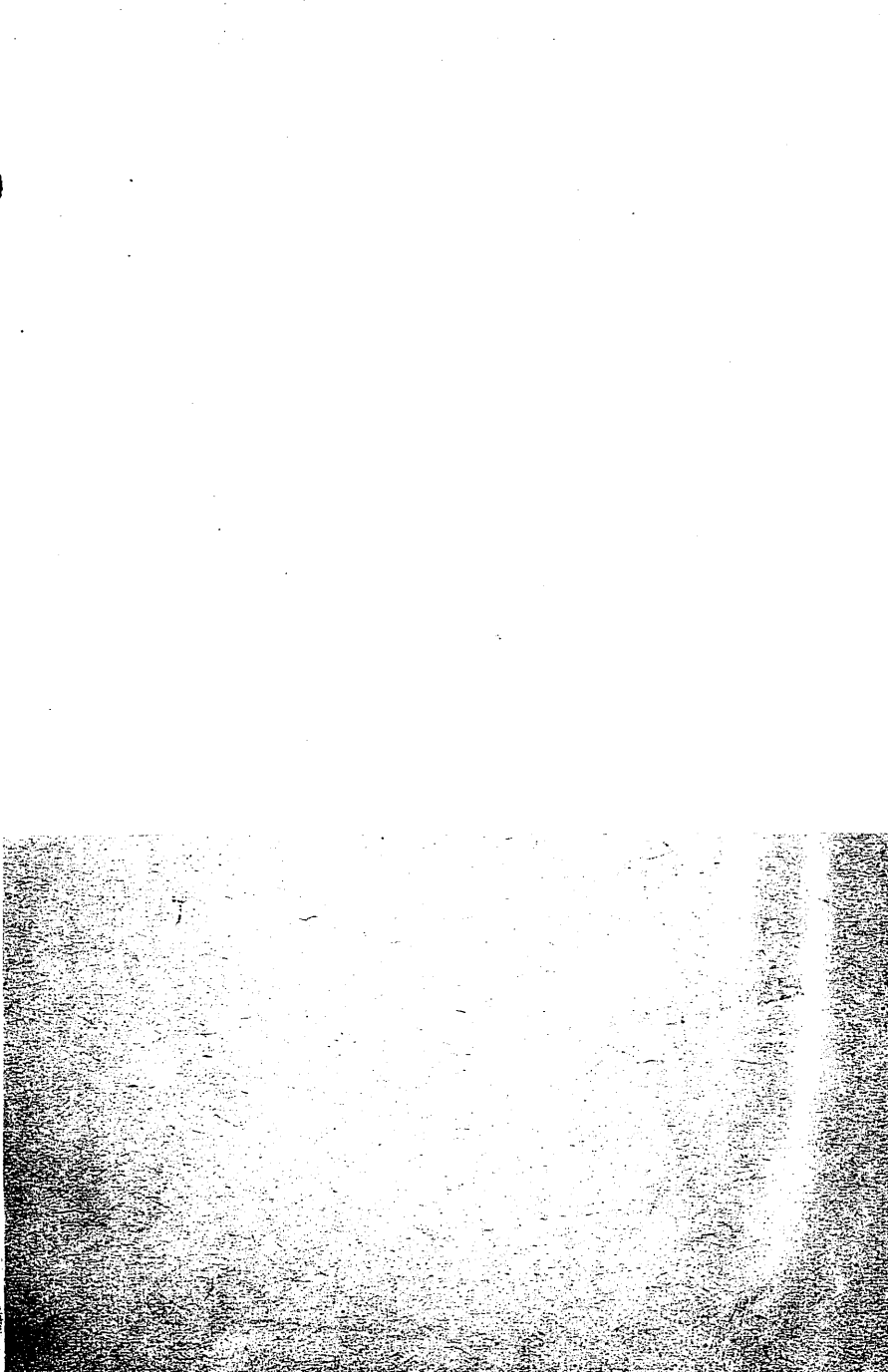
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